Mavis Ann Barnett

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THE FIELD OF MUSTARD

By A. E. Coppard

THE FIELD OF MUSTARD. *Tales*
ADAM AND EVE AND PINCH ME. *Tales*
CLORINDA WALKS IN HEAVEN. *Tales*
THE BLACK DOG. *Tales*
FISHMONGER'S FIDDLE. *Tales*
HIPS AND HAWS. *Poems*

THE FIELD OF MUSTARD

TALES BY

A. E. COPPARD

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THE FIELD OF MUSTARD

THE FIELD OF MUSTARD

ON A WINDY AFTERNOON IN NOVEMBER THEY were gathering kindling in the Black Wood, Dinah Lock, Amy Hardwick, and Rose Olliver, three sere disvirgined women from Pollock's Cross. Mrs. Lock wore clothes of dull butcher's blue, with a short jacket that affirmed her plumpness, but Rose and Amy had on long grey ulsters. All of them were about forty years old, and the wind and twigs had tousled their gaunt locks, for none had a hat upon her head. They did not go far beyond the margin of the wood, for the forest ahead of them swept high over a hill and was gloomy; behind them the slim trunks of beech, set in a sweet ruin of leaf hoar and scattered, and green briar nimbly fluttering, made a sort of palisade against the light of the open, which was grey, and a wide field of mustard which was yellow. The three women peered up into the trees for dead branches, and when they found any Dinah Lock, the vivacious woman full of shrill laughter, with a bosom as massive as her haunches, would heave up a rope with an iron bolt tied to one end. The bolted end would twine itself around the dead branch, the three women would tug, and after a sharp crack the quarry would fall; as often as not

the women would topple over too. By and by they met an old hedger with a round belly belted low, and thin legs tied at each knee, who told them the time by his ancient watch, a stout timepiece which the women sportively admired.

"Come Christmas I'll have me a watch like that!" Mrs. Lock called out. The old man looked a little dazed as he fumblingly replaced his chronometer. "I will," she continued, "if the Lord spares me and the pig don't pine."

"You . . . you don't know what you're talking about," he said. "That watch was my uncle's watch."

"Who was he? I'd like one like it."

"Was a sergeant-major in the lancers, fought under Sir Garnet Wolseley, and it was given to him."

"What for?"

The hedger stopped and turned on them: "Doing of his duty."

"That all?" cried Dinah Lock. "Well, I never got no watch for that a-much. Do you know what I see when I went to London? I see'd a watch in a bowl of water, it was glass, and there was a fish swimming round it. . . ."

"I don't believe it."

"There was a fish swimming round it. . . ."

"I tell you I don't believe it. . . ."

"And the little hand was going on like Clackford Mill. That's the sort of watch I'll have me; none of your Sir Garney Wolsey's!"

"He was a noble Christian man, that was."

"Ah! I suppose he slept wid Jesus?" yawped Dinah.

"No he didn't," the old man disdainfully spluttered. "He never did. What a God's the matter wid ye?" Dinah cackled with laughter. "Pah!" he cried, going away, "great fat thing! Can't tell your guts from your elbows."

Fifty yards further on he turned and shouted some obscenity back at them, but they did not heed him; they had begun to make three faggots of the wood they had collected, so he put his fingers to his nose at them and shambled out to the road.

By the time Rose and Dinah were ready, Amy Hardwick, a small, slow, silent woman, had not finished bundling her faggot together.

"Come on, Amy," urged Rose.

"Come on," Dinah said.

"All right, wait a minute," she replied listlessly.

"O God, that's death!" cried Dinah Lock, and heaving a great faggot to her shoulders she trudged off, followed by Rose with a like burden. Soon they were out of the wood, and crossing a

highway they entered a footpath that strayed in a diagonal wriggle to the far corner of the field of mustard. In silence they journeyed until they came to that far corner, where there was a hedged bank. Here they flung their faggots down and sat upon them to wait for Amy Hardwick.

In front of them lay the field they had crossed, a sour scent rising faintly from its yellow blooms that quivered in the wind. Day was dull, the air chill, and the place most solitary. Beyond the field of mustard the eye could see little but forest. There were hills there, a vast curving trunk, but the Black Wood heaved itself effortlessly upon them and lay like a dark pall over the outline of a corpse. Huge and gloomy, the purple woods draped it all completely. A white necklace of a road curved below, where a score of telegraph poles, each crossed with a multitude of white florets, were dwarfed by the hugeness to effigies that resembled hyacinths. Dinah Lock gazed upon this scene whose melancholy, and not its grandeur, had suddenly invaded her; with elbows sunk in her fat thighs, and nursing her cheeks in her hands, she puffed the gloomy air, saying:

"O God, cradle and grave is all there is for we."

"Where's Amy got to?" asked Rose.

"I could never make a companion of her, you know," Dinah declared.

"Nor I," said Rose, "she's too sour and slow."

"Her disposition's too serious. Of course, your friends are never what you want them to be, Rose. Sometimes they're better — most often they're worse. But it's such a mercy to have a friend at all; I like you, Rose; I wish you was a man."

"I might just as well ha' been," returned the other woman.

"Well, you'd ha' done better; but if you had a tidy little family like me you'd wish you hadn't got 'em."

"And if you'd never had 'em you'd ha' wished you had."

"Rose, that's the cussedness of nature, it makes a mock of you. I don't believe it's the Almighty at all, Rose. I'm sure it's the devil, Rose. Dear heart, my corn's a-giving me what-for; I wonder what that bodes?"

"It's restless weather," said Rose. She was dark, tall, and not unbeautiful still, though her skin was harsh and her limbs angular. "Get another month or two over — there's so many of these long dreary hours."

"Ah, your time's too long, or it's too short, or it's just right but you're too old. Cradle and

grave's my portion. 'Fat old thing!' he called me."

Dinah's brown hair was ruffled across her pleasant face and she looked a little forlorn, but corpulence dispossessed her of tragedy. "I be thin enough a-summertimes for I lives light and sweats like a bridesmaid, but winters I'm fat as a hog."

"What all have you to grumble at then?" asked Rose, who had slid to the ground and lay on her stomach staring up at her friend.

"My heart's young, Rose."

"You've your husband."

"He's no man at all since he was ill. A long time ill, he was. When he coughed, you know, his insides come up out of him like coffee grouts. Can you ever understand the meaning of that? Coffee! I'm growing old, but my heart's young."

"So is mine, too: but you got a family, four children grown or growing." Rose had snapped off a sprig of the mustard flower and was pressing and pulling the bloom in and out of her mouth. "I've none, and never will have." Suddenly she sat up, fumbled in her pocket, and produced her purse. She slipped the elastic band from it, and it gaped open. There were a few coins there and a scrap of paper folded. Rose took out the paper and smoothed it open under Dinah's curious gaze. "I

found something lying about at home the other day, and I cut this bit out of it." In soft tones she began to read:

"The day was void, vapid; time itself seemed empty. Come evening it rained softly. I sat by my fire turning over the leaves of a book, and I was dejected, until I came upon a little old-fashioned engraving at the bottom of a page. It imaged a procession of some angelic children in a garden, little placidly-naked substantial babes, with tiny bird-wings. One carried a bow, others a horn of plenty, or a hamper of fruit, or a set of reed-pipes. They were garlanded and full of grave joys. And at the sight of them a strange bliss flowed into me such as I had never known, and I thought this world was all a garden, though its light was hidden and its children not yet born."

Rose did not fold the paper up; she crushed it in her hand and lay down again without a word.

"Huh, I tell you, Rose, a family's a torment. I never wanted mine. God love, Rose, I'd lay down my life for 'em; I'd cut myself into fourpenny pieces so they shouldn't come to harm; if one of 'em was to die I'd sorrow to my grave. But I know, I know, I know I never wanted 'em, they were not for me, I was just an excuse for their blundering

into the world. Somehow I've been duped, and every woman born is duped so, one ways or another in the end. I had my sport with my man but I ought never to have married. Now I'd love to begin all over again, and as God's my maker, if it weren't for those children, I'd be gone off out into the world again to-morow, Rose. But I dunno what 'ud become o' me."

The wind blew strongly athwart the yellow field, and the odour of mustard rushed upon the brooding women. Protestingly the breeze flung itself upon the forest; there was a gliding cry among the rocking pinions as of some lost wave seeking a forgotten shore. The angular faggot under Dinah Lock had begun to vex her; she too sunk to the ground and lay beside Rose Olliver, who asked:

"And what 'ud become of your old man?"

For a few moments Dinah Lock paused. She too took a sprig of the mustard and fondled it with her lips. "He's no man now, the illness feebled him, and the virtue's gone; no man at all since two years, and bald as a piece of cheese — I like a hairy man, like . . . do you remember Rufus Blackthorn, used to be gamekeeper here?"

Rose stopped playing with her flower. "Yes, I knew Rufus Blackthorn."

"A fine bold man that was! Never another like him hereabouts, nor in England neither; not in the whole world — though I've heard some queer talk of those foreigners, Australians, Chinymen. Well!"

"Well?" said Rose.

"He is a devil." Dinah Lock began to whisper. "A perfect devil; I can't say no fairer than that, I wish I could, but I can't."

"O come," protested Rose, "he was a kind man. He'd never see anybody want for a thing."

"No," there was playful scorn in Dinah's voice; "he'd shut his eyes first!"

"Not to a woman he wouldn't, Dinah."

"Ah! Well — perhaps — he was good to women."

"I could tell you things as would surprise you," murmured Rose.

"You! But — well — no, no. I could tell *you* things as you wouldn't believe. Me and Rufus! We was — O my — yes!"

"He *was* handsome."

"Oh, a pretty man!" Dinah acceded warmly. "Black as coal and bold as a fox. I'd been married nigh on ten years when he first set foot in these parts. I'd got three children then. He used to give me a saucy word whenever he saw me, for I

liked him and he knew it. One Whitsun Monday I was home all alone, the children were gone somewheres, and Tom was away boozing. I was putting some plants in our garden — I loved a good flower in those days — I wish the world was all a garden, but now my Tom he digs 'em up, digs everything up proper and never puts 'em back. Why, we had a crocus, once! And as I was doing that planting some one walked by the garden in such a hurry. I looked up and there was Rufus, all dressed up to the nines, and something made me call out to him. "Where be you off to in that flaming hurry," I says. "Going to a wedding," says he. "Shall I come with 'ee?" I says. "Ah yes," he says, very glad; "but hurry up for I be sharp set and all." So I run in-a-doors and popped on my things and off we went to Jim Pickering's wedding over at Clackford Mill. When Jim brought the bride home from church that Rufus got hold of a gun and fired it off up chimney, and down come soot, the bushels of it! All over the room, and a chimney-pot burst and rattled down the tiles into a prambulator. What a rumbullion that was! But no one got angry — there was plenty of drink and we danced all the afternoon. Then we come home together again through the woods, O Lord — I said to myself — I shan't come out with you ever again,

and that's what I said to Rufus Blackthorn. But I did, you know! I woke up in bed that night, and the moon shone on me dreadful — I thought the place was afire. But there was Tom snoring, and I lay and thought of me and Rufus in the wood, till I could have jumped out into the moonlight, stark, and flown over the chimney. I didn't sleep any more. And I saw Rufus the next night, and the night after that, often, often. Whenever I went out I left Tom the cupboardful — that's all he troubled about. I was mad after Rufus, and while that caper was on I couldn't love my husband. No."

"No?" queried Rose.

"Well, I pretended I was ill, and I took my young Katey to sleep with me, and give Tom her bed. He didn't seem to mind, but after a while I found he was gallivanting after other women. Course, I soon put a stopper on that. And then — what do you think? Bless me if Rufus weren't up to the same tricks! Deep as the sea, that man. Faithless, you know, but such a bold one."

Rose lay silent, plucking wisps of grass; there was a wry smile on her face.

"Did ever he tell you the story of the man who was drowned?" she asked at length. Dinah shook her head. Rose continued. "Before he came here

he was keeper over in that Oxfordshire, where the river goes right through the woods, and he slept in a boathouse moored to the bank. Some gentleman was drowned near there, an accident it was, but they couldn't find the body. So they offered a reward of ten pound for it to be found. . . ."

"Ten, ten pounds!"

"Yes. Well, all the watermen said the body wouldn't come up for ten days. . . ."

"No more they do."

"It didn't. And so late one night — it was moonlight — some men in a boat kept on hauling and poking round the house where Rufus was, and he heard 'em say, 'It must be here, it must be here,' and Rufus shouts out to them, 'Course he's here! I got him in bed with me!'"

"Aw!" chuckled Dinah.

"Yes, and next day he got the ten pounds, because he *had* found the body and hidden it away."

"Feared nothing," said Dinah, "nothing at all; he'd have been rude to Satan. But he was very delicate with his hands, sewing and things like that. I used to say to him, 'Come, let me mend your coat,' or whatever it was, but he never would, always did such things of himself. 'I don't allow no female to patch my clothes,' he'd say, ''cos they

works with a red-hot needle and a burning thread.' And he used to make fine little slippers, out of reeds."

"Yes," Rose concurred, "he made me a pair."

"You!" Dinah cried. "What — were you . . . ?"

Rose turned her head away. "We was all cheap to him," she said softly, "cheap as old rags; we was like chaff before him."

Dinah Lock lay still, very still, ruminating; but whether in old grief or new rancour Rose was not aware, and she probed no further. Both were quiet, voiceless, recalling the past delirium. They shivered, but did not rise. The wind increased in the forest, its hoarse breath sorrowed in the yellow field, and swift masses of cloud flowed and twirled in a sky without end and full of gloom.

"Hallo!" cried a voice, and there was Amy beside them, with a faggot almost overwhelming her. "Shan't stop now," she said, "for I've got this faggot perched just right, and I shouldn't ever get it up again. I found a shilling in the 'ood, you," she continued shrilly and gleefully. "Come along to my house after tea, and we'll have a quart of stout."

"A shilling, Amy!" cried Rose.

"Yes," called Mrs. Hardwick, trudging stead-

ily on. " I tried to find the fellow to it, but no more luck. Come and wet it after tea ! "

" Rose," said Dinah, " come on." She and Rose with much circumstance heaved up their faggots and tottered after, but by then Amy was turned out of sight down the little lane to Pollock's Cross.

" Your children will be home," said Rose as they went along, " they'll be looking out for you."

" Ah, they'll want their bellies filling ! "

" It must be lovely a-winter's nights, you setting round your fire with 'em, telling tales, and brushing their hair."

" Ain't you got a fire of your own indoors," grumbled Dinah.

" Yes."

" Well, why don't you set by it then ! " Dinah's faggot caught the briars of a hedge that overhung, and she tilted round with a mild oath. A covey of partridges feeding beyond scurried away with ruckling cries. One foolish bird dashed into the telegraph wires and dropped dead.

" They're good children, Dinah, yours are. And they make you a valentine, and give you a ribbon on your birthday, I expect ? "

" They're naught but a racket from cockcrow till the old man snores — and then it's worse ! "

" Oh, but the creatures, Dinah ! "

"You . . . you got your quiet trim house, and only your man to look after, a kind man, and you'll set with him in the evenings and play your dominoes or your draughts, and he'll look at you — the nice man — over the board, and stroke your hand now and again."

The wind hustled the two women closer together, and as they stumbled under their burdens Dinah Lock stretched out a hand and touched the other woman's arm. "I like you, Rose, I wish you was a man."

Rose did not reply. Again they were quiet, voiceless, and thus in fading light they came to their homes. But how windy, dispossessed and ravaged, roved the darkening world! Clouds were borne frantically across the heavens, as if in a rout of battle, and the lovely earth seemed to sigh in grief at some calamity all unknown to men.

AFTER TEA PHILIP REPTON AND EULALIA Burnes discussed their gloomy circumstances. Repton was the precarious sort of London journalist, a dark deliberating man, lean and drooping, full of genteel unprosperity, who wrote articles about *Single Tax, Diet and Reason, The Futility of this, that and the other,* or *The Significance of the other, that and this;* all done with a bleak care and signed P. Stick Repton. Eulalia was brown-haired and hardy, undeliberating and intuitive; she had been milliner, clerk, domestic help and something in a canteen; and P. Stick Repton had, as one commonly says, picked her up at a time when she was drifting about London without a penny in her purse, without even a purse, and he had not yet put her down.

"I can't understand! It's sickening, monstrous!" Lally was fumbling with a match in front of the gas fire, for when it was evening, in September, it always got chilly on a floor so high up. Their flat was a fourth-floor one and there were — Oh, fifteen thousand stairs! Out of the window and beyond the chimneys you could see the long glare from lights in High Holborn, and hear the hums and hoots of buses. And that was a comfort.

"Lower! Turn it lower!" yelled Philip. The gas had ignited with an astounding thump; the kneeling Lally had thrown up her hands and dropped the matchbox, saying "Damn" in the same tone as one might say good morning to a milkman.

"You shouldn't do it, you know," grumbled Repton. "You'll blow us to the deuce." And that was just like Lally, that was Lally all over, always: the gas, the knobs of sugar in his tea, the way she . . . and the, the . . . O dear, dear! In their early life together, begun so abruptly and illicitly six months before, her simple hidden beauties had delighted him by their surprises; they had peered and shone brighter, had waned and recurred; she was less the one star in his universe than a faint galaxy.

This room of theirs was a dingy room, very small but very high. A lanky gas tube swooped from the middle of the ceiling towards the middle of the table-cloth as if burning to discover whether that was pink or saffron or fawn — and it *was* hard to tell — but on perceiving that the cloth, whatever its tint, was disturbingly spangled with dozens of cupstains and several large envelopes, the gas tube in the violence of its disappointment contorted itself abruptly, assumed a lateral bend,

and put out its tongue of flame at an oleograph of Mona Lisa which hung above the fireplace.

Those envelopes were the torment to Lally; they were the sickening, monstrous manifestations which she could not understand. There were always some of them lying there, or about the room, bulging with manuscripts that no editors — they *couldn't* have perused them — wanted; and so it had come to the desperate point when, as Lally was saying, something had to be done about things. Repton had done all *he* could; he wrote unceasingly, all day, all night, but all his projects insolvently withered, and morning, noon and evening brought his manuscripts back as unwanted as snow in summer. He was depressed and baffled and weary. And there was simply nothing else he could do, nothing in the world. Apart from his own wonderful gift he was useless, Lally knew, and he was being steadily and stupidly murdered by those editors. It was weeks since they had eaten a proper meal. Whenever they obtained any real nice food now, they sat down to it silently, intently and destructively. As far as Lally could tell there seemed to be no prospect of any such meals again in life or time, and the worst of it all was Philip's pride — he was actually too proud to ask anyone for assistance! Not that he would be too proud to

accept help if it were offered to him: O no, if it came he would rejoice at it! But still, he had that nervous shrinking pride that coiled upon itself, and he would not *ask;* he was like a wounded animal that hid its woe far away from the rest of the world. Lally alone knew his need, but why could not other people see it — those villainous editors! His own wants were so modest and he had a generous mind.

" Phil," Lally said, seating herself at the table. Repton was lolling in a wicker arm-chair beside the gas fire. " I'm not going on waiting and waiting any longer, I must go and get a job. Yes, I must. We get poorer and poorer. We can't go on like this any longer, it's no use, and I can't bear it."

" No, no, I can't have that, my dear. . . ."

" But I will! " she cried. " Oh, why are you so proud? "

" Proud! Proud! " He stared into the gas fire, his tired arms hanging limp over the arms of the chair. " You don't understand. There are things the flesh has to endure, and things the spirit too must endure. . . ." Lally loved to hear him talk like that; and it was just as well, for Repton was much given to such discoursing. Deep in her mind was the conviction that he had simple access to profound, almost unimaginable, wisdom. " It isn't

pride, it is just that there is a certain order in life, in my life, that it would not do for. I could not bear it, I could never rest: I can't explain that, but just believe it, Lally." His head was empty but unbowed; he spoke quickly and finished almost angrily. " If only I had money! It's not for myself. I can stand all this, any amount of it. I've done so before, and I shall do again and again I've no doubt. But I have to think of you."

That was fiercely annoying. Lally got up and went and stood over him.

" Why are you so stupid? I can think for myself and fend for myself. I'm not married to you. You have your pride, but I can't starve for it. And I've a pride, too, I'm a burden to you. If you won't let me work now while we're together, then I must leave you and work for myself."

" Leave! Leave me now? When things are so bad? " His white face gleamed his perturbation up at her. " O well, go, go." But then, mournfully moved, he took her hands and fondled them. " Don't be a fool, Lally; it's only a passing depression, this; I've known worse before, and it never lasts long, something turns up, always does. There's good and bad in it all, but there's more goodness than anything else. You see."

" I don't want to wait for ever, even for good-

ness. I don't believe in it, I never see it, never feel it, it is no use to me. I could go and steal, or walk the streets, or do any dirty thing — easily. What's the good of goodness if it isn't any use?"

"But, but," Repton stammered, "what's the use of bad, if it isn't any better?"

"I mean . . ." began Lally.

"You don't mean anything, my dear girl."

"I mean, when you haven't any choice it's no use talking moral, or having pride, it's stupid. Oh, my darling," she slid down to him and lay against his breast, "it's not you, you are everything to me; that's why it angers me so, this treatment of you, all hard blows and no comfort. It will never be any different, I feel it will never be different now, and it terrifies me."

"Pooh!" Repton kissed her and comforted her: she was his beloved. "When things are wrong with us our fancies take their tone from our misfortunes, badness, evil. I sometimes have a queer stray feeling that one day I shall be hanged. Yes, I don't know what for, what *could* I be hanged for? And, do you know, at other times I've had a kind of intuition that one day I shall be — what do you think? — Prime Minister of the country! Yes, well you can't reason against such things. I know what I should do, I've my plans, I've even made

a list of the men for my cabinet. Yes, well, there you are!"

But Lally had made up her mind to leave him; she would leave him for a while and earn her own living. When things took a turn for the better she would join him again. She told him this. She had friends who were going to get her some work.

"But what are you going to do, Lally, I . . ."

"I'm going away to Glasgow," said she.

"Glasgow?" He had heard things about Glasgow! Good heavens!

"I've some friends there," the girl went on steadily. She had got up and was sitting on the arm of his chair. "I wrote to them last week. They can get me a job almost anywhen, and I can stay with them. They want me to go — they've sent the money for my fare. I think I shall have to go."

"You don't love me then!" said the man.

Lally kissed him.

"But *do* you? Tell me!"

"Yes, my dear," said Lally, "of course."

An uneasiness possessed him; he released her moodily. Where was their wild passion flown to? She was staring at him intently, then she tenderly said: "My love, don't you be melancholy, don't take it to heart so. I'd cross the world to find you a pin."

"No, no, you mustn't do that," he exclaimed idiotically. At her indulgent smile he grimly laughed too, and then sank back in his chair. The girl stood up and went about the room doing vague things, until he spoke again.

"So you are tired of me?"

Lally went to him steadily and knelt down by his chair. "If I was tired of you, Phil, I'd kill myself."

Moodily he ignored her. "I suppose it had to end like this. But I've loved you desperately." Lally was now weeping on his shoulder, and he began to twirl a lock of her rich brown hair absently with his fingers as if it were a seal on a watch chain. "I'd been thinking we might as well get married, as soon as things had turned round."

"I'll come back, Phil," she clasped him so tenderly, "as soon as you want me."

"But you are not really going?"

"Yes," said Lally.

"You're not to go!"

"I wouldn't go if . . . if anything . . . if you had any luck. But as we are now I must go away, to give you a chance. You see that, darling Phil?"

"You're not to go; I object. I just love you, Lally, that's all, and of course I want to keep you here."

"Then what are we to do?"

"I . . . don't . . . know. Things drop out of the sky. But we must be together. You're not to go."

Lally sighed: he was stupid. And Repton began to turn over in his mind the dismal knowledge that she had taken this step in secret, she had not told him while she was trying to get to Glasgow. Now here she was with the fare, and as good as gone! Yes, it was all over.

"When do you propose to go?"

"Not for a few days, nearly a fortnight."

"Good God," he moaned. Yes, it was all over then. He had never dreamed that this would be the end, that she would be the first to break away. He had always envisaged a tender scene in which he could tell her, with dignity and gentle humour, that . . . Well, he never had quite hit upon the words he would use, but that was the kind of setting. And now, here she was with her fare to Glasgow, her heart turned towards Glasgow, and she as good as gone to Glasgow! No dignity, no gentle humour — in fact he was enraged, sullen but enraged; he boiled furtively. But he said with mournful calm:

"I've so many misfortunes, I suppose I can bear this, too." Gloomy and tragic he was.

"Dear, darling Phil, it's for your own sake I'm going."

Repton sniffed derisively. "We are always mistaken in the reasons for our commonest actions; Nature derides us all. You are sick of me; I can't blame you."

Eulalia was so moved that she could only weep again. Nevertheless she wrote to her friends in Glasgow promising to be with them by a stated date.

Towards the evening of the following day, at a time when she was alone, a letter arrived addressed to herself. It was from a firm of solicitors in Cornhill inviting her to call upon them. A flame leaped up in Lally's heart: it might mean the offer of some work which would keep her in London after all! If only it were so she would accept it on the spot, and Philip would have to be made to see the reasonability of it. But at the office in Cornhill a more astonishing outcome awaited her. There she showed her letter to a little office boy with scarcely any fingernails and very little nose, and he took it to an elderly man who had a superabundance of both. Smiling affably the long-nosed man led her upstairs into the sombre den of a gentleman who had some white hair and a lumpy yellow com-

plexion. Having put to her a number of questions relating to her family history, and appearing to be satisfied and not at all surprised by her answers, this gentleman revealed to Lally the overpowering tidings that she was entitled to a legacy of eighty pounds by the will of a forgotten and recently deceased aunt. Subject to certain formalities, proofs of identity and so forth, he promised Lally the possession of the money within about a week.

Lally's descent to the street, her emergence into the clamouring atmosphere, her walk along to Holborn, were accomplished in a state of blessedness and trance, a trance in which life became a thousand times aerially enlarged, movement was a delight, and thought a rapture. She would give all the money to Philip, and if he very much wanted it she would even marry him now. Perhaps, though, she would save ten pounds of it for herself. The other seventy would keep them for . . . it was impossible to say how long it would keep them. They could have a little holiday somewhere in the country together, he was so worn and weary. Perhaps she had better not tell Philip anything at all about it until her lovely money was really in her hand. Nothing in life, at least nothing about money, was ever certain; something horrible might happen at the crucial moment and the money be snatched

from her very fingers. Oh, she would go mad then! So for some days she kept her wonderful secret.

Their imminent separation had given Repton a tender sadness that was very moving. "Eulalia," he would say; for he had suddenly adopted the formal version of her name: "Eulalia, we've had a great time together, a wonderful time, there will never be anything like it again." She often shed tears, but she kept the grand secret still locked in her heart. Indeed, it occurred to her very forcibly that even now his stupid pride might cause him to reject her money altogether. Silly, silly Philip! Of course it would have been different if they had married; he would naturally have taken it then, and really, it would have *been* his. She would have to think out some dodge to overcome his scruples. Scruples were *such* a nuisance, but then it was very noble of him: there were not many men who wouldn't take money from a girl they were living with.

Well, a week later she was summoned again to the office in Cornhill and received from the white-haired gentleman a cheque for eighty pounds drawn on the Bank of England to the order of Eulalia Burnes. Miss Burnes desired to cash the cheque straightway, so the large-nosed elderly

clerk was deputed to accompany her to the Bank of England close by and assist in procuring the money.

"A very nice errand!" exclaimed that gentleman as they crossed to Threadneedle Street past the Royal Exchange. Miss Burnes smiled her acknowledgment, and he began to tell her of other windfalls that had been disbursed in his time — but vast sums, very great persons — until she began to infer that Blackbean, Carp and Ransome were universal dispensers of heavenly largesse.

"Yes, but," said the clerk, hawking a good deal from an affliction of catarrh, "I never got any myself, and never will. If I did, do you know what I would do with it?" But at that moment they entered the portals of the bank, and in the excitement of the business, Miss Burnes forgot to ask the clerk how he would use a legacy, and thus she possibly lost a most valuable slice of knowledge. With one fifty-pound note and six five-pound notes clasped in her handbag she bade good-bye to the long-nosed clerk, who shook her fervently by the hand and assured her that Blackbean, Carp and Ransome would be delighted at all times to undertake any commissions on her behalf. Then she fled along the pavement, blithe as a bird, until she was breathless with her flight. Presently she came op-

posite the window of a typewriting agency. Tripping airily into its office she laid a scrap of paper before a lovely Hebe who was typing there.

"I want this typed, if you please," said Lally.

The beautiful typist read the words on the scrap of paper and stared at the heiress.

"I don't want any address to appear," said Lally; "just a plain sheet, please."

A few moments later she received a neatly typed page folded in an envelope, and after paying the charge she hurried off to a District Messenger office. Here she addressed the envelope in a disguised hand to *P. Stick Repton, Esq.,* at their address in Holborn. She read the typed letter through again:

DEAR SIR,

In common with many others I entertain the greatest admiration for your literary abilities, and I therefore beg you to accept this tangible expression of that admiration from a constant reader of your articles who, for purely private reasons, desires to remain anonymous.

Your very sincere
WELLWISHER.

Placing the fifty-pound note upon the letter Lally carefully folded them together and put them

both into the envelope. The attendant then gave it to a uniformed lad, who sauntered off whistling very casually, somewhat to Lally's alarm — he looked so small and careless to be entrusted with fifty pounds. Then Lally went out, changed one of her five-pound notes and had a lunch — half-a-crown, but it was worth it. Oh, how enchanting and exciting London was! In two days more she would have been gone: now she would have to write off at once to her Glasgow friends and tell them she had changed her mind, that she was now settled in London. Oh, how enchanting and delightful! And to-night he would take her out to dine in some fine restaurant, and they would do a theatre. She did not really want to marry Phil, they had got on so well without it, but if he wanted that too she did not mind — much. They would go away into the country for a whole week. What money would do! Marvellous! And looking round the restaurant she felt sure that no other woman there, no matter how well-dressed, had as much as thirty pounds in her handbag.

Returning home in the afternoon she became conscious of her own betraying radiance; very demure and subdued and usual she would have to be, or he might guess the cause of it. Though she danced up the long flights of stairs she entered their room

quietly, but the sight of Repton staring out of the window, forlorn as a drowsy horse, overcame her and she rushed to embrace him crying " Darling! "

" Hullo, hullo! " he smiled.

" I'm so fond of you, Phil dear."

" But . . . but you're deserting me! "

" O no," she cried archly; " I'm not — not deserting you."

" All right." Repton shrugged his shoulders, but he seemed happier. He did not mention the fifty pounds then: perhaps it had not come yet — or perhaps he was thinking to surprise her.

" Let's go for a walk, it's a screaming lovely day," said Lally.

" Oh, I dunno." He yawned and stretched. " Nearly tea-time, isn't it? "

" Well, we . . . " Lally was about to suggest having tea out somewhere, but she bethought herself in time. " I suppose it is. Yes, it is."

So they stayed in for tea. No sooner was tea over than Repton remarked that he had an engagement somewhere. Off he went, leaving Lally disturbed and anxious. Why had he not mentioned the fifty pounds? Surely it had not gone to the wrong address? This suspicion once formed, Lally soon became certain, tragically sure, that she had misaddressed the envelope herself. A conviction

that she had put No. 17 instead of No. 71 was almost overpowering, and she fancied that she hadn't even put London on the envelope — but Glasgow. That was impossible, though, but — Oh, the horror! — somebody else was enjoying their fifty pounds. The girl's fears were not allayed by the running visit she paid to the messenger office that evening, for the rash imp who had been entrusted with her letter had gone home and therefore could not be interrogated until the morrow. By now she was sure that he had blundered; he had been so casual with an important letter like that! Lally never did, and never would again, trust any little boys who wore their hats so much on one side, were so glossy with hair-oil, and went about whistling just to madden you. She burned to ask where the boy lived, but in spite of her desperate desire she could not do so. She dared not, it would expose her to . . . to something or other she could only feel, not name; you had to keep cool, to let nothing, not even curiosity, master you.

Hurrying home again, though hurrying was not her custom, and there was no occasion for it, she wrote the letter to her Glasgow friends. Then it crossed her mind that it would be wiser not to post the letter that night; better wait until the morning,

after she had discovered what the horrible little messenger had done with her letter. Bed was a poor refuge from her thoughts, but she accepted it, and when Phil came home she was not sleeping. While he undressed he told her of the lecture he had been to, something about Agrarian Depopulation it was, but even after he had stretched himself beside her, he did not speak about the fifty pounds. Nothing, not even curiosity, should master her, and so she calmed herself, and in time fitfully slept.

At breakfast next morning he asked her what she was going to do that day.

"Oh," replied Lally offhandedly, "I've a lot of things to see to, you know; I must go out. I'm sorry the porridge is so awful this morning, Phil, but . . ."

"Awful?" he broke in. "But it's nicer than usual! Where are you going? I thought — our last day, you know — we might go out somewhere together."

"Dear Phil!" Lovingly she stretched out a hand to be caressed across the table. "But I've several things to do. I'll come back early, eh?" She got up and hurried round to embrace him.

"All right," he said. "Don't be long."

Off went Lally to the messenger office, at first as happy as a bird, but on approaching the build-

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ing the old tremors assailed her. Inside the room was the cocky little boy who bade her "Good morning" with laconic assurance. Lally at once questioned him, and when he triumphantly produced a delivery book she grew limp with her suppressed fear, one fear above all others. For a moment she did not want to look at it: Truth hung by a hair, and as long as it so hung she might swear it was a lie. But there it was, written right across the page, an entry of a letter delivered, signed for in the well-known hand, *P. Stick Repton.* There was no more doubt, only a sharp indignant agony as if she had been stabbed with a dagger of ice.

"O yes, thank you," said Lally calmly. "Did you hand it to him yourself?"

"Yes'm," replied the boy, and he described Philip.

"Did he open the letter?"

"Yes'm."

"There was no answer?"

"No'm."

"All right." Fumbling in her bag, she added: "I think I've got a sixpence for you."

Out in the street again she tremblingly chuckled to herself. "So that is what he is like, after all. Cruel and mean!" He was going to let her go and keep the money in secret to himself! How despi-

cable! Cruel and mean, cruel and mean. She hummed it to herself: "Cruel and mean, cruel and mean!" It eased her tortured bosom. "Cruel and mean!" And he was waiting at home for her, waiting with a smile for their last day together. It would *have* to be their last day. She tore up the letter to her Glasgow friends, for now she *must* go to them. So cruel and mean! Let him wait! A 'bus stopped beside her and she stepped on to it, climbing to the top and sitting there while the air chilled her burning features. The 'bus made a long journey to Plaistow. She knew nothing of Plaistow, she wanted to know nothing of Plaistow, but she did not care where the bus took her; she only wanted to keep moving, and moving away, as far away as possible from Holborn and from him, and not once let those hovering tears down fall.

From Plaistow she turned and walked back as far as the Mile End Road. Thereabouts, wherever she went she met clergymen, dozens of them. There must be a conference, about charity or something, Lally thought. With a vague desire to confide her trouble to some one, she observed them; it would relieve the strain. But there was none she could tell her sorrow to, and failing that, when she came to a neat restaurant she entered it and consumed a fish. Just beyond her three sleek parsons

were lunching, sleek and pink; bald, affable, consoling men, all very much alike.

"I saw Carter yesterday," she heard one say. Lally liked listening to the conversation of strangers, and she had often wondered what clergymen talked about among themselves.

"What, Carter! Indeed. Nice fellow Carter. How was he?"

"Carter loves preaching, you know!" cried the third.

"O yes, he loves preaching!"

"Ha ha ha, yes."

"Ha ha ha, oom."

"Awf'ly good preacher, though."

"Yes, awf'ly good."

"And he's awf'ly good at comic songs, too."

"Yes?"

"Yes!"

Three glasses of water, a crumbling of bread, a silence suggestive of prayer.

"How long has he been married?"

"Twelve years," returned the cleric who had met Carter.

"Oh, twelve years!"

"I've only been married twelve years myself," said the oldest of them.

"Indeed!"

"Yes, I tarried very long."

"Ha ha ha, yes."

"Ha ha ha, oom."

"Er . . . have you any family?"

"No."

Very delicate and dainty in handling their food they were; very delicate and dainty.

"My rectory is a magnificent old house," continued the recently married one. "Built originally in 1700. Burnt down. Rebuilt 1784."

"Indeed!"

"Humph!"

"Seventeen bedrooms and two delightful tennis courts."

"Oh, well done!" the others cried, and then they all fell with genteel gusto upon a pale blancmange.

From the restaurant the girl sauntered about for a while, and then there was a cinema wherein, seated warm and comfortable in the twitching darkness, she partially stilled her misery. Some nervous fancy kept her roaming in that district for most of the evening. She knew that if she left it she would go home, and she did not want to go home. The naphtha lamps of the booths at Mile End were bright and distracting, and the hum of the evening business was good despite the smell. A man was weaving sweetstuffs from a pliant roll of warm

toffee that he wrestled with as the athlete wrestles with the python. There were stalls with things of iron, with fruit or fish, pots and pans, leather, string, nails. Watches for use — or for ornament — what d'ye lack? A sailor told naughty stories while selling bunches of green grapes out of barrels of cork dust which he swore he had stolen from the Queen of Honolulu. People clamoured for them both. You could buy back numbers of the comic papers at four a penny, rolls of linoleum for very little more — and use either for the other's purpose.

"At thrippence per foot, mesdames," cried the sweating cheapjack, lashing himself into ecstatic furies, "that's a piece of fabric weft and woven with triple-strength Andalusian jute, double-hot-pressed with rubber from the island of Pagama, and stenciled by an artist as poisoned his grandfather's cook. That's a piece of fabric, mesdames, as the king of heaven himself wouldn't mind to put down in his parlour — if he had the chance. Do I ask thrippence a foot for that piece of fabric? Mesdames, I was never a daring chap."

Lally watched it all, she looked and listened; then looked and did not see, listened and did not hear. Her misery was not the mere disappointment of love, not that kind of misery alone; it was

the crushing of an ideal in which love had had its home, a treachery cruel and mean. The sky of night, so smooth, so bestarred, looked wrinkled through her screen of unshed tears; her sorrow was a wild cloud that troubled the moon with darkness.

In miserable desultory wandering she had spent her day, their last day, and now, returning to Holborn in the late evening, she suddenly began to hurry, for a new possibility had come to lighten her dejection. Perhaps, after all, so whimsical he was, he was keeping his "revelation" until the last day, or even the last hour, when (nothing being known to her, as he imagined) all hopes being gone and they had come to the last kiss, he would take her in his arms and laughingly kill all grief, waving the succour of a flimsy bank-note like a flag of triumph. Perhaps even, in fact surely, that was why he wanted to take her out to-day! Oh, what a blind wicked stupid girl she was, and in a perfect frenzy of bubbling faith she panted homewards for his revealing sign.

From the pavement below she could see that their room was lit. Weakly she climbed the stairs and opened the door. Phil was standing up, staring so strangely at her. Helplessly and half-guilty she began to smile. Without a word said he came

quickly to her and crushed her in his arms, her burning silent man, loving and exciting her. Lying against his breast in that constraining embrace, their passionate disaster was gone, her doubts were flown; all perception of the feud was torn from her and deeply drowned in a gulf of bliss. She was aware only of the consoling delight of their reunion, of his amorous kisses, of his tongue tingling the soft down on her upper lip that she disliked and he admired. All the soft wanton endearments that she so loved to hear him speak were singing in her ears, and then he suddenly swung and lifted her up, snapped out the gaslight, and carried her off to bed.

Life that is born of love feeds on love; if the wherewithal be hidden, how shall we stay our hunger? The galaxy may grow dim, or the stars drop in a wandering void; you can neither keep them in your hands nor crumble them in your mind.

What was it Phil had once called her? Numskull! After all it was his own fifty pounds, she had given it to him freely, it was his to do as he liked with. A gift was a gift, it was poor spirit to send money with the covetous expectation that it would return to you. She would surely go to-morrow.

The next morning he awoke her early, and kissed her.

"What time does your train go?" said he.

"Train!" Lally scrambled from his arms and out of bed.

A fine day, a glowing day. O bright, sharp air! Quickly she dressed, and went into the other room to prepare their breakfast. Soon he followed, and they ate silently together, although whenever they were near each other he caressed her tenderly. Afterwards she went into the bedroom and packed her bag; there was nothing more to be done, he was beyond hope. No woman wants to be sacrificed, least of all those who sacrifice themselves with courage and a quiet mind. When she was ready to go she took her portmanteau into the sitting-room; he, too, made to put on his hat and coat.

"No," murmured Lally, "you're not to come with me."

"Pooh, my dear!" he protested; "nonsense."

"I won't have you come," cried Lally with an asperity that impressed him.

"But you can't carry that bag to the station by yourself!"

"I shall take a taxi." She buttoned her gloves.

"My dear!" His humourous deprecation annoyed her.

"O bosh!" Putting her gloved hands around

his neck she kissed him coolly. " Good-bye. Write to me often. Let me know how you thrive, won't you, Phil? And " — a little waveringly — " love me always." She stared queerly at the two dimples in his cheeks; each dimple was a nest of hair that could never be shaved.

" Lally darling, beloved girl! I never loved you more than now, this moment. You are more precious than ever to me."

At that, she knew her moment of sardonic revelation had come — but she dared not use it, she let it go. She could not so deeply humiliate him by revealing her knowledge of his perfidy. A compassionate divinity smiles at our puny sins. She knew his perfidy, but to triumph in it would defeat her own pride. Let him keep his gracious, mournful airs to the last, false though they were. It was better to part so, better from such a figure than from an abject scarecrow, even though both were the same inside. And something capriciously reminded her, for a flying moment, of elephants she had seen swaying with the grand movement of tidal water — and groping for monkey-nuts.

Lally tripped down the stairs alone. At the end of the street she turned for a last glance. There he was, high up in the window, waving good-byes. And she waved back to him.

THE TRUANT HART

MONTY BARLASS WAS A FARMER AND A PUBlican. Fifty easy-going years had grown him good and left him active, for he had a wife that suited him and his occupation was grand. Petty farming made him hale, and the small additional task of running *The Drover Inn* kept him affable.

At five o'clock one summer's morning he hoisted the window blind of his bedroom and looked forth. Overnight it had come a storm, but now it was fine everywhere, though the wind was still at full. In front of him Peck Common with its three or four acres of bland turf was crisp and genial. The four ash trees were streaming with sound and casting long frail shadows over the pool of spring water in the middle. Half a dozen tile-and-flint cottages tucked themselves snug and shy between fat hedges on the far side of the common. Everything was beautiful. His wife stirred in the bed beside him.

"How are you?" he inquired.

"I'm not so very grand, thank you," she said. So he turned and hoisted up the blind of a window in the side wall and gazed at his barn and his shelters. Timmy Dogtrees, the boy, was already there. A horse looked over the half-door of its stall.

Some calves were trailing from the sloshy croft to nibble at a defenceless stack of beans. The old sow wandered into the heifers' shed where it was dry, but they ejected her. Hens, dumpy as muffs or spindly as hawks, were bobbing about, the ducks mused in the puddles, and little porkers trotted hither and yon. Windily the trees tossed their shining foliage.

"How are you?" he said again to his wife, but she was fast asleep now, so he pulled on his breeches and went downstairs and there, having hustled into his boots, he thought of taking a peep at his garden, over behind the barn. Monty opened the yard door and stepped over a lolling dog, shouting "Hoi" to the calves that feared him, "Hoosh" to the pigs that didn't, and nearly spread-eagling a kitten as he avoided the hens that wanted to pick something from his boots.

Oh, what a spectacle of desolation met his sight in the garden! Misery, mortification and madness! A long grove of kidney beans, pride of the summer and flushed with unusual pods, lay in wanton ruin, smitten and prostrate; the potato crop — its haulms had been strong as bushes and level as water — was no longer a crop, it was a bed of gall. Surely an elephant had gambolled upon it. Cabbages were torn and gnashed, in short, the whole

garden had been ravished and put to grief by some one or something or other. But what? No gate was open, there was no gap in the hedge, and beyond the hedge itself there was only a great beech wood stretching a mile or more. Not another farm for a very long way. How could a cow get in there? Whose cow? And get out again! Damage? Somebody would have to pay for the damage, and pay good and all for the damage. But who? He enquired of Timmy Dogtrees. But that boy never was any good for anything in this mortal world. Not a thing. The only thing he was any good for. . . . By the skimmer of Satan, the tomato plants were all smashed too! A score of tomato plants! A hundredweight of tomatoes — two hundredweight!

At breakfast Monty stormed and Monty swore, but Mrs. Barlass said *she* hadn't done it. She said it again at noon, too, because Monty was swearing again. Such a form of exchange Monty never excelled in; it left him conversationally confuted, dumb.

"But if I had my way . . ." continued Mrs. Barlass.

"Ah, what would you do, ma'am?" There was relief in sarcasm.

"I'd watch out for them."

"Watch out! And what would you? And why, and where, and who, and how? Find out! Here's my damage and I can't odds it. I shall never find that out, I do not suppose."

Mrs. Barlass — the handsome woman she was, with brooches and plump pink fingers! — was then called out to the bar to attend to a butcher who had blown his nose very deliberately and distinctly there, but Mrs. Barlass wanted nothing of him that day, so: "Good morning, ma'am," he said.

"Good morning, butcher."

"I'll call again, Saturday."

"Yes."

"All being well."

"Yes."

"Good morning, ma'am."

In came Willie Waugh for a pint or so before she could return to her dinner, and when Monty heard who it was he took Waugh into the garden and showed him the destruction, the greens, the beans, the potatoes, tomatoes, celery and peas, the whole agglomeration of riot and savagery.

Willie Waugh was a sturdy, somewhat dissolute-looking man — but the Lord knows it, you cannot condemn a man for his appearance, even when he does call a spade a spade. An old conical hat he had on, and an old comical coat with sleeves

too long for him, and sometimes his cottage was called *The Poacher's Rest.*

Willie tilted his conical hat and scratched his grey hair.

"That's a tidy come-up!" he said.

"A cow, I reckon?" Mr. Barlass suggested.

Willie shook his head. "No. I'll tell you. A deer done that. Two or three perhaps."

"What do you say: deer?"

"There's often some of 'em knocking about the 'ood, escaped from Lord Camovers's park. That's a deer, Monty, right enough. See, it lep in over the hedge by that elm tree" — Willie waved his pipe about as he pointed out the signs — "and that's the way it went back, too."

Well, so Monty went off to interview Lord Camovers's keeper, and the keeper said he could not do anything, but that if Monty ever did see a deer in his garden he was to be sure and shoot it. Mr. Barlass told Willie Waugh of this.

"Righto! We'll lay for him, Monty; we'll lay for him to-night, eh?" said Willie.

So that night, a beautiful soft smooth night, Monty took his gun and Willie took his, and they crept out into the garden.

"If you sees him, Monty, let him have it under the forelegs."

They made themselves snug behind two or three trusses of hay, where they could watch the elm tree and be comfortable, with a big jar of beer, devilish near a gallon, and some bread and cheese. But they dared not speak and they dared not smoke and so, by and by, although it was two or three coats colder, Monty heaved up a sigh and began to snore. Willie nudged him awake. "Lord, that won't do, Monty!" And he gave him a sup of beer. A lovely night it was, past one o'clock, with stars in the contented heavens, and everything quiet except for the mice in the hedge, and not too dark except for the forest, and that was as black as ever and ever amen. And there was Monty snoring again.

"Give over!" hissed Willie Waugh, "that deer'd hear you in kingdom come."

Monty roused up again for awhile, and Willie lay with his gun cocked, listening like a man whose hope of eternity depended on his ears. And what did he hear? Nothing. At least, nothing but Monty snoring long trajectory snores, or whirligig snores, snores of anguish and fury and joy, high and low, a terrific diapason.

"So help me Solomon!" groaned Willie. "I'm off." And home he went, leaving Monty snoring to the dawn.

The next night they tried again, but it was all the same; Monty was overcome and Willie had to leave him to it. Willie was incensed, and the day after that, when he went across to see Monty, he said so.

"I'm surprised at you! No deer'd come 'ithin a hundred mile. . . . S'elp me, why you . . . not of a snore like that; O my, you gave it a good 'un . . . not 'less he was mad. He'd skip like the hindlegs of a flea. Now if you waunts to ketch a deer this-a-ways I tell you what we've to do. Have you got any wire? Lots of it?"

Yes, Monty had got bushels of wire: "What sort?"

"Any plain stranded wire?"

"I got some fencing wire."

"Thass it; thass the very hammer."

"But what are you thinking of, Willie Waugh?"

"Ha, ho! There's more in my jelly-knot than any lawyer ever knew! I waunt about half a chain of it."

"What you want it for?"

"Or ever will know, Monty!"

"What are you going to do with it?"

"You wouldn't believe it if I was to tell you, Monty."

" Well, I'm damned if I believes it if you don't."

Then Willie told him he was going to set a snare for that deer, just the same as he would set a wire for rabbit, only bigger. Monty swore. It was foolish. It couldn't be done.

" Give me the wire," said Willie Waugh.

And he gave him the wire and Willie made a loop of this strong wire, the same as he would for a rabbit, but much larger, and set it nice and artful over the hedge by the elm tree, just where he fancied the deer would leap, and bound the end of it round the elm tree, with plenty of play on it, too, twenty feet or more.

" He won't have it," commented Monty.

" He will," said Willie, " you see ! "

They set the snare towards evening and really, Monty began to think, it looked good and reasonable.

" You can snore the lumps out of a flock bed to-night, Monty. O my . . . s'elp me, well . . . no more of that canter in the garden. And in the morning, please God, we shall see."

So that's how they left it.

Well, Willie Waugh got up early in the morning, very early he got up and took his gun and walked across to *The Drover*. He couldn't hear anything when he got to the garden, but he cocked

his gun, crept warily to the hedge, and peeped over. And believe it, or believe it not, you, but there was a great stag deer lying there among the greenery. Stone dead it was, with the wire caught round its skull.

"Poor creature!" murmured Waugh. It had dashed both its antlers off; it must have gone mad when it felt the thong, for it had been rushing at the tree, gouging great pieces of the bark. Its horns lay there, and the garden was in a worse cantription than before. But when Willie called and told Monty, Monty was very glad, and he said Willie could have the deer for himself and take it away and make what he could on it.

The day was a Friday, and Willie had a job of work to do so he could not take the deer away then, but next day he and Monty and Timmy heaved it up into Willie's cart, and away drove Willie to a town half a dozen miles off for to sell it to a butcher. But the butcher would not buy it. Willie went to another, but he would not buy it either. Not a butcher in that town would buy the deer off Willie Waugh.

"O dear!" said Willie to the last of them. "That's a tidy come up. Look here, will you skin it and dress it for me, so as I can sell the joints the best I can?"

Yes, the butcher said he could do that for him; but he could not do it that day, being Saturday and a busy day for him; and he could not do it on a Sunday because it was not fitting; but if Willie would leave the carcass with him he would prepare it and have it ready by Monday mid-day.

"That 'ull do, that 'ull do well." And Willie drove homewards, thinking over the names of all the folk he could sell a piece to, and calculating that he could make nearly enough out of it to buy the pony a set of harness.

Monday comes, and he drives again to the butcher. By ginger, that was a hot day! He threw off his coat as he jogged along, and he had a pint at *The Golden Ball* and another at *The Load of Faggots*. The butcher took him into his killing shed and showed him the carcass of the deer, beautifully dressed, a fine beast; so fat that you could not see its kidneys. But it was a very queer colour all over. Very queer. Already it was black, extraordinarily black.

"Yes," exclaimed the butcher, "that's where you were wrong. You should have pouched him and let his innards out. Directly he was dead. That's where you were wrong. Always have the innards out first thing."

"He smells queer," commented Willie, as they were laying the deer in the cart.

"Oh, it's good honest meat," the butcher assured him. Willie covered it up with a clean sack, paid the butcher his dues, and set towards home again. It was so hot that he could not keep from sweating, nohow, and the flies were most cruel; in fact, when he got down at *The Dog and Partridge* there was a great cloud of flies following the cart, a regular cloud. The landlady of *The Dog and Partridge* came out to inspect the carcass, but what with its colour, its smell, and the flies, she declared that she really could not fancy a portion of it. The same at *The Load of Faggots,* and the same at *The Golden Ball.* Nobody fancied it, and by the time he arrived at Peck Common, Willie Waugh was of like mind himself, although he was always very hearty with his food.

"It's gone already," he exclaimed despondently. The flies were like ten hives of bees mad swarming on his cart. "It's too far gone." They could not put up with it in the house. His wife said, "O dear, no." "I shall have to bury it," sighed Willie, and he tipped the carcass out on the common and covered it with straw and piled faggots upon it. He told his wife to cut off the best portions and boil it for the hens, and for days he

offered lumps of it free to his neighbours for the same purpose, but they fought shy of it even for that. Dogs had been chivvying the remains, and every person that poked his nose into the air of that common observed that there was something about that would be better elsewhere. All except Mother Dogtrees, Timmy's great-aunt. She helped herself to a fairish portion, indeed you might say that she had a very nice forequarter of that deer.

" Come again, Rose, and don't spare it," said Willie Waugh to her, " you get on with it."

Rose Dogtrees had a grateful soul, and she wanted to offset Willie's kindness with a trifle of her own. So one evening when he came across from *The Drover* after dark he found Mrs. Dogtrees waiting at his home for him. Being a very neat-handed cook she had baked a nice little pie for supper and had brought it along for him and his wife.

" Heigh up ! " he cried. " There was no call for you to do that, Rose. It's very kind of you. Sit down and eat along of us." And he pulled a large bottle of beer from his pocket. They cut the pie in three. It was a sin to cut such a wonder of a pie, so smart it was, so sweet it was, with a crusty rose on top and four diamond leaves, and cunning little

notches all round the edge. They cut the pie in three and fell to.

" By cram, this is lovely! " cried Willie. " Crust as light as love, and the meat's like cream."

" It is, truly," said Mrs. Waugh. Her name was Ivy. She was a Baxter from Smoorton Comfrey. " It is indeed."

" Ha, you like it! " cackled old Mother Dogtrees.

" I could eat this for a fortnight, ma'am, and much obliged to you."

" No thanks to me," replied the old woman. " It's your own meat in it."

" My meat? " said Willie.

" Your venison."

" My venison? " echoed Willie.

" Yes, that old deer. You give me a piece last week."

" But, that deer! " He was almost awestruck. " But God bless us, Rose, it lay out on the common for a week! Thass so. I couldn't face it, and no more I couldn't stand it! Why God bless us " — he swallowed a few more ounces — " it's beautiful! And we been a chucking it to the fowls! "

" More fool you! "

" Thass right. Ho, ho! Thass right, Rose."

" Why, it's kings' meat! "

" Thass right. And I never tasted anything so beautiful in my life," cried Willie, " never! But I tell ye — I knew he was a good 'un. You couldn't see his kidneys for fat. There now. And we bin a giving it to the hens."

" I never give mine," laughed Rose.

" Ah, well, there . . . save me Solomon . . . has it all gone, mother? " he asked his wife.

Yes, it was all gone now, every bit of it. Might have brought him pounds even now if only people hadn't been so foolish and he so hasty. Pounds! That pony's harness was very weak and withering. Still, the hens had fattened. And Monty might stand him something when he heard the fatal news.

" Fill up glasses," he said, " yours too, Rose." Willie Waugh lifted his own glass. " Well, I'm not a chapel-going feller, never was. I never said a prayer in my life (did I, Ivy?) ; but here's to God Almighty who allus sends us a good harvest. . . ."

" Amen," whispered Mrs. Dogtrees.

" . . . and my daily drop," added he.

Oh, Willie Waugh was a rough chap; he liked hearty food, and he called a spade a spade; that was his hobby.

THEY HAD LIVED AND TRAVELLED TOGETHER for twenty years, and this is a part of their history: not much, but all that matters. Ever since reaching marriageable age they had been together, and so neither had married, though Olive had had her two or three occasions of perilous inducement. Being women they were critical of each other, inseparably critical; being spinsters they were huffy, tender, sullen, and demure, and had quarrelled with each other ten thousand times in a hundred different places during their "wanderings up and down Europe." That was the phrase Camilla used in relating their maidenly Odyssey, which had comprised a multitude of sojourns in the pensions of Belgium, Switzerland, Italy and France. They quarrelled in Naples and repented in Rome; exploded in anger at Arles, were embittered at Interlaken, parted for ever at Lake Garda, Taormina and Bruges; but running water never fouls, they had never really been apart, not anywhere. Olive was like that, and so was her friend; such natures could nowise be changed. Camilla Hobbs, slight and prim, had a tiny tinkling mind that tinkled all day long; she was all things to little nothings. The other, Olive Sharples, the portly one, had a mind

like a cuckoo-clock; something came out and cried "Cuckoo" now and again, quite sharply, and was done with it. They were moulded thus, one supposes, by the hand of Providence; it could neither be evaded nor altered, it could not even be mitigated, for in Camilla's prim mind and manner, there was a prim deprecation of Olive's boorish nature, and for her part Olive resented Camilla's assumption of a superior disposition. Saving a precious month or two in Olive's favour they were both now of a sad age, an age when the path of years slopes downward to a yawning inexplicable gulf.

"Just fancy!" Camilla said on her forty-fifth birthday — they were at Chamonix then — "we are ninety between us!"

Olive glowered at her friend, though a couple of months really is nothing. "When I am fifty," she declared, "I shall kill myself."

"But why?" Camilla was so interested.

"God, I don't know!" returned Olive.

Camilla brightly brooded for a few moments. "You'll find it very hard to commit suicide; it's not easy, you know, not at all, I've heard time and time again that it's most difficult. . . ."

"Pooh!" snorted Olive.

"But I tell you! I tell you I knew a cook at

Leamington who swallowed ground glass in her porridge, pounds and pounds, and nothing came of it."

"Pooh!" Olive was contemptuous, "never say die."

"Well, that's just what people say who can't do it!"

The stream of their companionship was far from being a rill of peaceful water, but it flowed, more and more like a cataract it flowed, and was like to flow on as it had for those twenty years. Otherwise they were friendless! Olive had had enough money to do as she modestly liked, for though she was impulsive her desires were frugal, but Camilla had had nothing except a grandmother. In the beginning of their friendship Olive had carried the penurious Camilla off to Paris where they mildly studied the art, and ardently pursued the practice, of water-colour painting. Olive, it might be said, transacted doorways and alleys, very shadowy and grim but otherwise quite nice; and Camilla did streams with bending willow and cow on bank, really sweet. In a year or two Camilla's grandmother died of dropsy and left her a fortune, much larger than Olive's, in Bank stock, Insurance stock, Distillery, Coal — Oh, a mass of money! And when something tragical happened to

half of Olive's property — it was in salt shares or jute shares, such unstable, friable material — it became the little fluttering Camilla's joy to play the fairy godmother in her turn. So there they were in a bondage less sentimental than appeared, but more sentimental than was known.

They returned to England for George V's coronation. In the train from Chamonix a syphon of soda-water which Camilla imported into the carriage — it was an inexplicable thing, that bottle of soda-water, as Olive said after the catastrophe: God alone knew why she had brought it — Camilla's syphon, what with the jolting of the train and its own gaseobility, burst on the rack. Just burst! A handsome young Frenchwoman travelling in their compartment was almost convulsed with mirth, but Olive, sitting just below the bottle, was drenched — she declared — to the midriff. Camilla lightly deprecated the coarseness of the expression. How could she help it if a bottle took it into its head to burst like that! In abrupt savage tones Olive merely repeated that she was soaked to the midriff, and to Camilla's horror she began to divest herself of some of her clothing. Camilla rushed to the windows, pulled down the blinds and locked the corridor door. The young Frenchwoman sat smiling while Olive removed her cor-

sets and her wetted linen; Camilla rummaged so feverishly in Olive's suit-case that the compartment began to look as if arranged for a jumble sale; there were garments and furbelows strewn everywhere. But at last Olive completed her toilet, the train stopped at a station, the young Frenchwoman got out. Later in the day, when they were nearing Paris, Olive's corsets could not be found.

"What did you do with them?" Olive asked Camilla.

"But I don't think I touched them, Olive. After you took them off I did not see them again. Where do you think you put them? Can't you remember?"

She helped Olive unpack the suit-case but the stays were not there. And she helped Olive to repack.

"What am I to do?" asked Olive.

Camilla firmly declared that the young Frenchwoman who had travelled with them in the morning must have stolen them.

"What for?" asked Olive.

"Well, what do people steal things for?" There was an air of pellucid reason in Camilla's question, but Olive was scornful.

"Corsets!" she exclaimed.

"I knew a cripple once," declared Olive, "who stole an ear trumpet."

"That French girl wasn't a cripple."

"No," said Camilla, "but she was married — at least, she wore a wedding ring. She looked as deep as the sea. I am positive she was up to no good."

"Bosh!" said Olive. "What the devil are you talking about?"

"Well, you should not throw your things about as you do."

"Soda-water," snapped Olive, with ferocious dignity, "is no place for a railway carriage."

"You mean . . . ?" asked Camilla with the daring sweetness of a maid of twenty.

"I mean just what I say."

"O no, you don't," purred the triumphant one; and she repeated Olive's topsy-turvy phrase. "Ha, ha, that's what you said!"

"I did not! Camilla, why are you such a liar? You know it annoys me."

"But I tell you, Olive. . . ."

"I did not. It's absurd. You're a fool."

Well, they got to England and in a few days it began to appear to them as the most lovely country they had ever seen. It was not only that, it was their homeland. Why have we stayed away so

long? Why did we not come back before? It was so marvellously much better than anything else in the world, they were sure of that. So much better, too, than their youthful recollection of it, so much improved; and the clearness! Why did we never come back? Why have we stayed away so long? They did not know; it was astonishing to find your homeland so lovely. Both felt that they could not bear to leave England again; they would settle down and build a house, it was time; their joint age was ninety! But, alas, it was difficult, it was impossible, to dovetail their idea of a house into one agreeable abode.

"I want," said Olive Sharples, "just an English country cottage with a few conveniences. That's all I can afford, and all I want."

So she bought an acre of land at the foot of a green hill in the Chilterns and gave orders for the erection of the house of her dreams. Truly it was a charming spot, pasture and park and glebe and spinney and stream, *deliciously* remote, quite half a mile from *any* village, and only to be reached by a *mere* lane. No sooner had her friend made this decision than Camilla too bought land there, half a dozen acres adjoining Olive's, and began to build the house of *her* dreams, a roomy house with a loggia and a balcony, planting her land with fruit

trees. The two houses were built close together, by the same men, and Camilla could call out greetings to Olive from her bedroom window before Olive was up in the morning, and Olive could hear her — though she did not always reply. Had Olive suffered herself to peer steadily into her secret thoughts, in order to discover her present feeling about Camilla, she would have been perplexed; she might even have been ashamed, but for the comfort of old acquaintance such telescopic introspection was denied her. The new cottage brought her felicity, halcyon days; even her bedroom contented her, so small and clean and bare it was. Beyond bed, washing-stand, mirror and rug there was almost nothing, and yet she felt that if she were not exceedingly careful she would break something. The ceiling was virgin white, the walls the colour of butter, the floor the colour of chocolate. The grate had never had a fire in it; not a shovelful of ashes had ever been taken from it and, please God — so it seemed to indicate — never would be. But the bed was soft and reposeful. O heavenly sleep!

The two friends dwelt thus in isolation; there they were, perhaps this was happiness. The isolation was tempered by the usual rural society, a squire who drank, a magistrate who was mad, and a lime-burner whose daughters had been to college

and swore like seamen. There was the agreeable Mr. Kippax, a retired fellmonger, in whom Camilla divined a desire to wed somebody — Olive perhaps. He was sixty and played on the violoncello. Often Olive accompanied him on Camilla's grand piano. Crump, crump, he would go; and primp, primp, Olive would reply. He was a serious man and once when they were alone he asked Olive why she was always so sad.

"I don't know. Am I?"

"Surely," he said grinning, running his fingers through his long grey hair. "Why are you?"

And Olive thought and thought. "I suppose I want impossible things."

"Such as . . . ?" He interrogated.

"I do not know. I only know that I shall never find them."

Then there were the vicarage people, a young vicar with a passionate complexion who had once been an actor and was now something of an invalid, having had a number of his ribs removed for some unpleasant purpose; charming Mrs. Vicar and tiny babe. Oh, and Mrs. Lassiter, the wife of a sea captain far away on the sea; yet she was content, and so by inference was the sea captain, for he never came home. There was a dearth of colour in her cheeks, it had crowded into her

lips, her hair, her eyes. So young, so beautiful, so trite, there was a fragrant imbecility about her.

Olive and Camilla seldom went out together: the possession of a house is often as much of a judgment as a joy, and as full of ardours as of raptures. Gardens, servants and tradespeople were not automata that behaved like eight-day clocks. By no means. Olive had an eight-day clock, a small competent little thing; it had to be small to suit her room. But Camilla had three — three eight-day clocks. And on the top of the one in the drawing-room . . . and really Camilla's house seemed a positive little mansion, all crystal and mirror and white pillars and soft carpets, but it wasn't a mansion any more than Olive's was a cottage . . . well, on the mantelpiece of the drawing-room, on top of Camilla's largest eight-day clock, there stood the bronze image of a dear belligerent little lion copied in miniature from a Roman antique. The most adorable creature it was, looking as if it were about to mew, for it was no bigger than a kitten although a grown-up lion with a mane and an expression of annoyance as if it had been insulted by an ox — a toy ox. The sweep of its tail was august; the pads of its feet were beautiful crumpled cushions, with claws (like the hooks of a tiny ship)

laid on the cushions. Simply ecstatic with anger, most adorable, and Olive loved it as it raged there on Camilla's eight-day clock. But clocks are not like gardens or servants or tradespeople, especially servants. No servant would stay there for long, the place was so lonely, they said, dreadful! And in wet weather the surroundings and approach — there was only a green lane and half a mile of that — were so muddy, dreadful mud; and when the moon was gone everything was steeped in darkness, and that was dreadful too! As neither Camilla nor Olive could mitigate these natural but unpleasing features — they were, of course, the gifts of Providence — the two ladies, Camilla at any rate, suffered from an ever-recurrent domestic Hail and Farewell. What, Camilla would inquire — *did* the servants want? There was the village, barely a mile away; if you climbed the hill you could see it splendidly, a fine meek little village; the woods, the hills, the fields, positively thrust their greenness upon it, bathed it as if in a prism — so that the brown chimney pots looked red and the yellow ones blue. And the church was new, or so nearly new that you might call it a good second-hand; it was made of brown bricks. Although it had no tower, or even what you might call a belfry, it had got a little square fat chimney over the front

gable with a cross of yellow bricks worked into the face of the chimney, while just below that was a bell cupboard stuffed with sparrows'-nests. And there were unusual advantages in the village — watercress, for instance. But Camilla's servants came and went, only Olive's Quincy Pugh remained. She was a dark young woman with a white amiable face, amiable curves to her body, the elixir of amiability in her blood, and it was clear to Camilla that *she* only remained because of Luke Feedy. He was the gardener, chiefly employed by Camilla, but he also undertook the work of Olive's plot. Unfortunately Olive's portion was situated immediately under the hill and, fence it how they would, the rabbits always burrowed in and stole Olive's vegetables. They never seemed to attack Camilla's more abundant acreage.

Close beside their houses there was a public footway, but seldom used, leading up into the hills. Solemn steep hills they were, covered with long fawn-hued grass that was never cropped or grazed, and dotted with thousands of pert little juniper bushes, very dark, and a few whitebeam trees whose foliage when tossed by the wind shook on the hill-side like bushes of entangled stars. Half-way up the hill path was a bulging bank that tempted climbers to rest, and here, all unknown to

Camilla, Olive caused an iron bench to be fixed so that tired persons could recline in comfort and view the grand country that rolled away before them. Even at midsummer it was cool on that height, just as in winter it took the sunbeams warmly. The air roving through the long fawn-hued grass had a soft caressing movement. Darkly green at the foot of the hill began the trees and hedges that diminished in the pastoral infinity of the vale, further and further yet, so very far and wide. At times Olive would sit on her iron bench in clear sunlight and watch a shower swilling over half a dozen towns, while beyond them, seen through the inundating curtain, very remote indeed lay the last hills of all, brightly growing and contented. Often Olive would climb to her high seat and bask in the delight, but soon Camilla discovered that the bench was the public gift of Olive. Thereupon, lower down the hill, Camilla caused a splendid ornate bench of teak with a footrest to be installed in a jolly nook surrounded by tall juniper bushes and cypresses, and she planted three or four trailing roses thereby. Whenever Camilla had visitors she would take them up the hill to sit on her splendid bench; even Olive's visitors preferred Camilla's bench, and remarked upon its superior charm. So much more handsome it was, and yet

Olive could not bear to sit there at all, never alone. And soon she gave up going even to the iron one.

Thus they lived in their rather solitary houses, supporting the infirmities of the domestic spirit by mutual commiseration, and coming to date occasions by the names of those servants — Georgina, Rose, Elizabeth, Sue — whoever happened to be with them when such and such an event occurred. These were not remarkable in any way. The name of Emma Tooting, for instance, only recalled a catastrophe to the parrot. One day she had actually shut the cockatoo — it was a stupid bird, always like a parson nosing about in places where it was not wanted — she had accidentally shut the cockatoo in the oven. The fire had not long been lit, the oven was not hot, Emma Tooting was brushing it out, the cockatoo was watching. Emma Tooting was called away for a few moments by the baker in the yard, came back, saw the door open, slammed it to with her foot, pulled out blower, went upstairs to make bed, came down later to make fire, heard most horrible noises in kitchen, couldn't tell where, didn't know they came from the oven, thought it was the devil, swooned straight away — and the cockatoo was baked. The whole thing completely unnerved Emma Tooting, and she gave notice. Such a good cook, too. Then

Mrs. Lassiter and the lime-burner — that was a mysterious business — were thought to have been imprudent in Minnie Hopplecock's time; at any rate, suspicion was giddily engendered then.

"I shouldn't be surprised," Camilla had declared, "if they were all the way, myself. Of course, I don't know, but it would not surprise me one bit. You see, we've only instinct to go upon, suspicion, but what else has anyone ever to go upon in such matters? She is so deep, she's deep as the sea; and as for men . . .! No, I've only my intuitions, but they are sufficient, otherwise what is the use of an intuition? And what *is* the good of shutting your eyes to the plain facts of life?"

"But why him?" inquired Olive brusquely.

"I suspect him, Olive." Camilla, calmly adjusting a hair-slide, peered at her yellow carpet which had a design in it, a hundred times repeated, of a spool of cord in red and a shuttlecock in blue. "I suspect him, just as I suspect the man who quotes Plato to me."

Mr. Kippax, that is — thought Olive. "But isn't that what Plato's for?" she asked.

"I really don't know what Plato is for, Olive; I have never read Plato; in fact I don't read him at all; I can't read him with enjoyment. Poetry, now, is a thing I can enjoy — like a bath — but I

can't talk about it, can you? I never talk about the things that are precious to me; it's natural to be reserved and secretive. I don't blame Maude Lassiter for that; I don't blame her at all, but she'll be lucky if she gets out of this with a whole skin: it will only be by the skin of her teeth."

"I'd always be content," Olive said, "if I could have the skin of my teeth for a means of escape."

"Quite so," agreed Camilla, "I'm entirely with you. O yes."

Among gardeners Luke Feedy was certainly the pearl. He had come from far away, a man of thirty or thirty-five, without a wife or a home in the world, and now he lodged in the village at Mrs. Thrupcott's cottage; the thatch of her roof was the colour of shag tobacco, her husband cut your hair in his vegetable garden for twopence a time. Luke was tall and powerful, fair and red. All the gardening was done by him, both Olive's and Camilla's, and all the odd and difficult jobs from firewood down to the dynamo for electric light that coughed in Camilla's shed. Bluff but comely, a pleasant man, a very conversational man, and a very attractable man; the maids were always uncommon friendly to him. And so even was Olive, Camilla observed, for she had actually bought him a gun to keep the rabbits out of the garden. Of

course a gun was no use for that — Luke said so — yet, morning or evening, Olive would perambulate with the gun, inside or outside the gardens, while Luke Feedy taught her the use of it, until one October day, when it was drawing on to evening — Bang! — Olive had killed a rabbit. Camilla had rushed to her balcony. "What is it?" she cried in alarm, for the gun had not often been fired before and the explosion was terrifying. Fifty yards away, with her back towards her, Olive in short black fur jacket, red skirt, and the Cossack boots she wore, was standing quite still holding the gun across her breast. The gardener stalked towards a bush at the foot of the hill, picked up a limp contorted bundle by its long ears, and brought it back to Olive. She had no hat on, her hair was ruffled, her face had gone white. The gardener held up the rabbit, a small soft thing, dead, but its eyes still stared, and its forefeet drooped in a gesture that seemed to beseech pity. Olive swayed away, the hills began to whirl, the house turned upside down, the gun fell from her hands. "Hullo!" cried Luke Feedy, catching the swooning woman against his shoulder. Camilla saw it all and flew to their aid, but by the time she had got down to the garden Feedy was there too, carrying Olive to her own door. Quincy ran for a glass of water, Camilla petted her, and

soon all was well. The gardener stood in the room holding his hat against his chest with both hands. A huge fellow he looked in Olive's small apartment. He wore breeches and leggings and a grey shirt with the sleeves uprolled, a pleasant comely man, very powerful, his voice seemed to excite a quiver in the air.

" What a fool I am," said Olive disgustedly.

" O no," commented the gardener. " O no. ma'am; it stands to reason. . . ." He turned to go about his business, but said: " I should have a sip o' brandy now, ma'am, if you'll excuse me mentioning it."

" Cognac! " urged Camilla.

" Don't go, Luke," Olive cried.

" I'll fetch that gun in, ma'am, I fancy it's going to rain." He stalked away, found his coat and put it on (for it was time to go home), and then he fetched in the gun. Camilla had gone.

" Take it away, please," cried Olive. " I never want to see it again. Keep it, do what you like, it's yours."

" Thank you, ma'am," said the imperturbable Feedy. Two small glasses of cognac and a long slim bottle stood upon a table in the alcove. Olive, still a little wan, pushed one towards him.

" Your very good health, ma'am." Feedy tipped

the thimbleful of brandy into his mouth, closed his lips, pursed them, gazed at the ceiling and sighed. Olive now switched on the light, for the room was growing dimmer every moment. Then she sat down on the settee that faced the fire. An elegant little settee in black satin with crimson piping. The big man stood slackly by the shut door and stared at the walls; he could not tell whether they were blue or green or grey, but the skirting was white and the fireplace was tiled with white tiles. Old and dark the furniture was though, and the mirror over the mantle was egg-shaped in a black frame. In the alcove made by the bow window stood the round table on crinkled legs, and the alcove itself was lined with a bench of tawny velvet cushions. Feedy put his empty glass upon the table.

"Do have some more; help yourself," said Olive, and Luke refilled the glass and drank again amid silence. Olive did not face him — she was staring into the fire — but she could feel his immense presence. There was an aroma, something of earth, something of man, about him, strange and exciting. A shower of rain dashed at the windows.

"You had better sit down until the rain stops." Olive poked a tall hassock to the fireplace with her foot, and Luke, squatting upon it, his huge boots

covering quite a large piece of the rug there, twirled the half-empty glass between his finger and thumb.

" Last time I drunk brandy," he mused, " was with a lady in her room, just this way."

Olive could stare at him now.

" She was mad," he explained.

" Oh," said Olive, as if disappointed.

" She's dead now," continued Luke, sipping.

Olive, without uttering a word, seemed to encourage his reminiscence.

" A Yorkshire lady she was, used to live in the manor house, near where I was then, a lonely place. Her brother had bought it because it was lonely, and sent her there to keep her quiet because she had been crossed in love, as they say, and took to drink for the sorrow of it; rich family, bankers, Croxton the name, if you ever heard of them? "

Olive, lolling back and sipping brandy, shook her head.

" A middling size lady, about forty-five she was, but very nice to look at — you'd never think she was daft — and used to live at the big house with only a lot of servants and a butler in charge of her, name of Scrivens. None of her family ever came near her, nobody ever came to visit her. There was

a big motor-car and they kept some horses, but she always liked to be tramping about alone; everybody knew her, poor daft thing, and called her Miss Mary, 'stead of by her surname Croxton, a rich family; bankers they were. Quite daft. One morning I was going to my work — I was faggoting then in Hanging Copse — and I'd got my billhook, my axe and my saw in a bag on my back when I see Miss Mary coming down the road towards me. 'Twas a bright spring morning and cold 'cause 'twas rather early; a rare wind on, and blew sharp enough to shave you; it blew the very pigeons out the trees, but she'd got neither jacket or hat and her hair was wild. 'Good morning, miss,' I said, and she said 'Good morning,' and stopped. So I stopped, too; I didn't quite know what to be at, so I said, 'Do you know where you're going?' "

"Look here," interrupted Olive, glancing vacantly around the room. "It's still raining; light your pipe."

"Thank you, ma'am." Luke began to prepare his pipe. "'Do you know where you're going?' I asks her. 'No,' she says. 'I've lost my way, where am I?' and she put" — Luke paused to strike a match and ignite the tobacco — "put her arm in my arm and said 'Take me home.' 'You're

walking away from home,' I said, so she turned back with me and we started off to her home. Two miles away or more, it was. 'It is kind of you,' she says, and she kept on chattering as if we were two cousins, you might say. 'You ought to be more careful and have your jacket on,' I said to her. 'I didn't think, I can't help it,' she says: 'it's the time o' love; as soon as the elder leaf is as big as a mouse's ear I want to be blown about the world,' she says. Of course she was thinking to find some one as she'd lost. She dropped a few tears. 'You must take care of yourself these rough mornings,' I said, 'or you'll be catching the inflammation.' Then we come to a public-house, *The Bank of England* 's the name of it, and Miss Mary asks me if we could get some refreshment there. 'That you can't,' I said ('cause I knew about her drinking), 'it's shut;' so on we went as far as Bernard's Bridge. She had to stop a few minutes there to look over in the river, all very blue and crimped with the wind; and there was a boathouse there, and a new boat cocked upside down on some trestles on the landing, and a chap laying on his back blowing in the boat with a pair of bellows. Well, on we goes, and presently she pulls out her purse: 'I'm putting you to a lot of trouble,' she says. 'Not at all, Miss,' I said, but she give me a

sovereign, then and there, she give me a sovereign."

Olive was staring at the man's hands; the garden soil was chalky, and his hands were covered with fine milky dust that left the skin smooth and the markings very plain.

" I didn't want to take the money, ma'am, but I had to, of course; her being such a grand lady it wasn't my place to refuse."

Olive had heard of such munificence before; the invariable outcome, the *dénouement* of Feedy's stories, the crown, the peak, the apex of them all was that somebody, at some point or other, gave him a sovereign. Neither more nor less. Never anything else. Olive thought it unusual for so *many* people . . .

" . . . and I says ' I'm very pleased, miss, to be a help to anyone in trouble.' ' That's most good of you,' she said to me. ' That's most good of you; it's the time of year I must go about the world, or I'd die," she says. By and by we come to the manor house and we marches arm in arm right up to the front door and I rong the bell. I was just turning away to leave her there but she laid hold of my arm again. ' I want you to stop,' she says, ' you've been so kind to me.' It was a bright fresh morning, and I rong the bell. ' I want you to stop,' she says.

Then the butler opened the door. ' Scrivens,' she says, ' this man has been very kind to me; give him a sovereign, will you.' Scrivens looked very straight at me, but I gave him as good as he sent, and the lady stepped into the hall. I had to follow her. ' Come in,' she says, and there was I in the dining-room, while Scrivens nipped off somewhere to get the money. Well, I had to set down on a chair while she popped out at another door. I hadn't hardly set down when in she come again with a lighted candle in one hand and a silver teapot in the other. She held the teapot up, and says ' Have some? ' and then she got two little cups and saucers out of a chiffonier and set them on the table and filled them out of the silver teapot. ' There you are,' she says, and she up with her cup and dronk it right off. I couldn't see no milk and no sugar and I was a bit flabbergasted, but I takes a swig — and what do you think? It was brandy, just raw brandy; nearly made the tears come out of my eyes, 'specially that first cup. All of a sudden she dropped on a sofy and went straight off to sleep, and there was I left with that candle burning on the table in broad daylight. Course I blew it out, and the butler came in and gave me the other sovereign, and I went off to my work. Rare, good-hearted lady, ma'am. Pity," sighed the gardener.

He sat hunched on the hassock, staring into the fire, and puffing smoke. There was attraction in the lines of his figure squatting beside her hearth, a sort of huge power. Olive wondered if she might sketch him some time, but she had not sketched for years now. He said that the rain had stopped, and got up to go. Glancing at the window Olive saw it was quite dark; the panes were crowded on the outside with moths trying to get in to the light.

"What a lot of mawths there be!" said Luke.

Olive went to the window to watch them. Swarms of fat brown furry moths with large heads pattered and fluttered silently about the shut panes, forming themselves into a kind of curtain on the black window. Now and then one of their eyes would catch a reflection from the light and it would burn with a fiery crimson glow.

"Good night, ma'am," the gardener said, taking the gun away with him. Outside, he picked up the dead rabbit and put it in his pocket. Olive drew the curtains; she did not like the moths' eyes, they were demons' eyes, and they filled her with melancholy. She took the tall brandy bottle from the table and went to replace it in a cabinet. In the cabinet she saw her little silver tea set, a silver pot on a silver tray with a bowl and a jug. Something impelled her to fill the teapot from the long

slim bottle. She poured out a cup and drank it quickly. Another. Then she switched out the light, stumbled to the couch and fell upon it, laughing stupidly, and kicking her heels with playful fury.

That was the beginning of Olive's graceless decline, her pitiable lapse into intemperance. Camilla one May evening had trotted across to Olive's cottage: afterwards she could recall every detail of that tiniest of journeys; rain had fallen and left a sort of crisp humidity in the gloomy air; on the pathway to Olive's door she nearly stepped on a large hairy catterpillar solemnly confronting a sleek nude slug. That lovely tree by Olive's door was desolated — she remembered — the blossoms had fallen from this flowering cherry tree that so wonderfully bloomed; its virginal bridal had left only a litter and a breath of despair. And then inside Olive's hall was the absurd old blunderbuss hanging on a strap, its barrel so large that you could slip an egg into it. Camilla fluttered into her friend's drawing-room: "Olive, could you lend me your gridiron?" And there was Olive lounging on the settee simply, incredibly, drunk! In daylight! It was about six o'clock of a May day. And Olive was so indecently jovial that Camilla, smitten with grief, burst into tears and rushed away home again.

She came back of course; she never ceased coming back, hour by hour, day after day; never would she leave Olive alone to her wretched debauches. Camilla was drenched with compunction, filled with divine energy; until she had dragged Olive from her trough, had taken her to live with her again under her own cherishing wings, she would have no rest. But Olive was not always tipsy, and though moved by Camilla's solicitude she refused to budge, or "make an effort," or do any of the troublesome things so dear to the heart of a friend. Fond as she was of Camilla she had a disinclination — of course she was fond of her, there was nothing she would not do for Camilla Hobbs — a disinclination to reside with her again. What if they had lived together for twenty years? It is a great nuisance that one's loves are determined not by judgment but by the feelings. There are two simple tests of any friendly relationship: can you happily share your bed with your friend, and can you, without unease, watch him or her partake of food. If you can do either of these things with amiability, to say nothing of joy, it is well between you; if you can do both it is a sign that your affection is rooted in immortal soil. Now Olive was forthright about food; she just ate it, that was what it was for. But she knew that even at break-

fast Camilla would cut her bread into little cubes or little diamonds; if she had been able to she would surely have cut it into little lozenges or little marbles; in fact the butter was patted into balls the same as you had in restaurants. Every shred of fat would be laboriously shaved from the rasher and discarded. The cube or the diamond would be rolled in what Camilla called the " jewse " — for her to swallow the grease but not the fat was a horrible mortification to Olive — rolled and rolled, and then impaled by the fork. Snip off a wafer of bacon, impale it; a triangle of white egg, impale that; plunge the whole into the yolk. Then, so carefully, with such desperate care, a granule of salt, the merest breath of pepper. Now the knife must pursue with infinite patience one or two minuscular crumbs idling in the plate, and at last wipe them gloatingly upon the mass. With her fork lavishly furnished and elegantly poised, Camilla would then bend to peer at sentences in her correspondence, and perhaps briskly inquire:

" Why are you so glum this morning, Olive? "

Of course Olive would not answer.

" Aren't you feeling well, dear? " Camilla would exasperatingly persist, still toying with her letters.

" What? " Olive would say.

Camilla would pop the loaded fork into her mouth, her lips would close tightly upon it, and when she drew the fork slowly from her encompassing lips it would be empty, quite empty and quite clean. Repulsive!

"Why are you so glum?"

"I'm not!"

"Sure? Aren't you?" Camilla would impound another little cube or diamond and glance smilingly at her letters. On that count alone Olive could not possibly resume life with her.

As for sleeping with Camilla — not that it was suggested she should, but it was the test — Olive's distaste for sharing a bed was ineradicable. In the whole of her life Olive had never known a woman with whom it would have been anything but an intensely unpleasant experience, neither decent nor comfortable. Olive was deeply virginal. And yet there had been two or three men who, perhaps, if it had not been for Camilla — such a prude, such a kill-joy — she might . . . well, goodness only knew. But Camilla had been a jealous harpy, always fond, Olive was certain, of the very men who had been fond of Olive. Even Edgar Salter, who had dallied with them one whole spring in Venice! Why there was one day in a hayfield on the Lido when the grass was mown in May . . . it was, oh,

fifteen years ago. And before that, in Paris, Hector Dubonnel, and Willie Macmaster! Camilla had been such a lynx, such a collar-round-the-neck, that Olive had found the implications, the necessities of romance quite beyond her grasp. Or, perhaps, the men themselves . . . they were not at all like the bold men you read about, they were only like the oafs you meet and meet and meet. Years later, in fact not ten years ago, there was the little Italian count in Rouen. They were all dead now perhaps, they were all dead. Or married. What was the use? What did it all matter?

Olive would lie abed till midday in torpor and vacancy, and in the afternoon she would mope and mourn in dissolute melancholy. The soul loves to rehearse painful occasions. At evening the shadows cast by the down-going sun would begin to lie aslant the hills and then she would look out of her window, and seeing the bold curves bathed in the last light she would exclaim upon her folly. "I have not been out in the sunlight all day; it would be nice to go and stand on the hill now and feel the warmth just once." No, she was too weary to climb the hill, but she would certainly go to-morrow, early, and catch the light coming from the opposite heaven. Now it was too late, or too damp, and she was very dull. The weeks idled by until

August came with the rattle of the harvest reapers, and then September with the boom of the sportsman's gun in the hollow coombes. Camilla one evening was sitting with her, Camilla who had become a most tender friend, who had realized her extremity, her inexplicable grief; Camilla who was a nuisance, a bore, who knew she was not to be trusted alone with her monstrous weakness for liquor, who constantly urged her to cross the garden and live in peace with her. No, no, she would not. "I should get up in the night and creep away," she thought to herself, "and leave her to hell and the judgment," but all she would reply to Camilla was: "Enjoy your own life, and I will mine. Don't want to burden yourself with a drunken old fool like me."

"Olive! Olive! what are you saying!"

"Drunken fool," repeated Olive sourly. "Don't badger me any more, let me alone, leave me as I am. I . . . I'll . . . I dunno . . . perhaps I'll marry Feedy."

"Nonsense," cried Camilla shrilly. She turned on the light and drew the blinds over the alcove window. "Nonsense," she cried again over her shoulder. "Nonsense."

"You let me alone, I ask you," commanded her friend. "Do as I like."

"But you can't . . . you can't think . . . why, don't be stupid!"

"I might. Why shouldn't I? He's a proper man; teach me a lot of things."

Camilla shuddered. "But you can't. You can't, he is going to marry somebody else."

"O God. What's that?" sighed Olive. "Who? You're not thinking to marry him yourself, are you? You're not going. . . ."

"Stuff! He's going to marry Quincy. He told me so himself. I'd noticed them for some time, and then, once, I came upon them suddenly, and really . . . ! Honest love-making is all very well, but of course one has a responsibility to one's servants. I spoke to him most severely, and he told me."

"Told you what?"

"That they were engaged to be married, so what. . . ."

"Quincy?"

"Yes, so what can one do?"

"Do. God above!" cried Olive. She touched a bell and Quincy came in answer. "Is this true?"

Quincy looked blankly at Miss Sharples.

"Are you going to marry Mr. Feedy?"

"Yes'm."

"When are you going to marry Mr. Feedy?" Olive had risen on unsteady legs.

" As soon as we can get a house, ma'am."

" When will that be? "

The girl smiled. She did not know; there were no houses to be had.

" I won't have it! " shouted Olive suddenly, swaying. " But no, I won't, I won't! You wretched devil! Go away, go off. I won't have you whoring about with that man I tell you. Go off, off with you; pack your box! "

The flushing girl turned savagely and went out, slamming the door.

" Oh, I'm drunk," moaned Olive, falling to the couch again. " I'm sodden. Camilla, what shall I do? "

" Olive, listen! Olive! Now you *must* come to live with me; you won't be able to replace her. What's the good? Shut up the house and let me take care of you."

" No, stupid wretch that I am. Don't want to burden yourself with a stupid wretch." Olive brushed a tear from her haggard eyes.

" Nonsense, darling! " cried her friend. " I want you immensely. Just as we once were, when we were so fond of each other. Aren't you fond of me still, Olive? You'll come, and we'll be so happy again. Shall we go abroad? "

Olive fondled her friend's hand with bemused

caresses. "You're too good, Camilla, and I ought to adore you. I do, I do, and I'm a beast. . . ."

"No, no, listen. . . ."

"Yes, I am, I'm a beast. I tell you I have wicked envious feelings about you, and sneer at you, and despise you in a low secret way. And yet you are, O Camilla, yes, you are true and honest and kind, and I know it, I know it." She broke off and stared tragically at her friend. "Camilla, were you ever in love?"

The question startled Camilla.

"Were you?" repeated Olive. "I've never known you to be. Were you ever in love?"

"O . . . sometimes . . . yes . . . sometimes."

Olive stared for a moment with a look of silent contempt, then almost guffawed.

"Bah! Sometimes! Good lord, Camilla. O no, no, you've never been in love. O no, no."

"But yes, of course," Camilla persisted, with a faint giggle.

"Who? Who with?"

"Why yes, of course, twenty times at least," admitted the astonishing Camilla.

"But listen, tell me," cried Olive, sitting up eagerly, as her friend sat down beside her on the couch. "Tell me — it's just you and I — tell me. Really in love?"

"Everybody is in love," said Camilla slowly, "sometime or another, and I was very solemnly in love . . . well . . . four times. Olive, you mustn't reproach yourself for . . . for all this. I've been . . . I've been bad, too."

"Four times! Four times! Perhaps you will understand me, Camilla, now. I've been in love all my life. Any man could have had me, but none did, not one."

"Never mind, dear. I was more foolish than you, that's all, Olive."

"Foolish! But how! It never went very far?"

"As far as I could go."

Olive eyed her friend, the mournful, repentant, drooping Camilla.

"What do you mean? How far?"

Camilla shrugged her shoulders. "As far as love takes you," she said.

"Yes, but . . ." pursued Olive, "do you mean . . . ?"

"I could go no further," Camilla explained quickly.

"But how — what — were you ever really and truly a lover."

"If you must know — that is what I mean."

"Four times!"

Camilla nodded.

" But I mean, Camilla, were you really, really, a mistress? "

" Olive, only for a very little while. O my dear," she declined on Olive's breast, " you see, you see, I've been worse, much worse than you. And it's all over. And you'll come back and be good, too? "

But her friend's eagerness would suffer no caresses; Olive was sobered and alert. " But . . . this, I can't understand . . . while we were together . . . inseparable we were. Who . . . did I know them? Who were they? "

Camilla, unexpectedly, again fairly giggled: " Well, then, I wonder if you can remember the young man we knew at Venice . . . ? "

" Edgar Salter, was it? " Olive snapped at the name.

" Yes."

" And the others? Willie Macmaster and Hercules and Count Filippo! " Olive was now fairly raging. Camilla sat with folded hands. " Camilla Hobbs, you're a fiend," screamed Olive, " a fiend, a fiend, an impertinent immoral fool. Oh, how I loathe you! "

" Miss Sharples," said Camilla, rising primly, " I can only say I despise you."

" A fool! " shrieked Olive, burying her face in

the couch; " an extraordinary person, with a horrible temper, and intolerant as a . . . yes, you are. Oh, you intolerable beast! "

" I can hardly expect you to realize, in your present state," returned Camilla, walking to the door, " how disgusting you are to me. You are like a dog that barks at every passer."

" There are people whose minds are as brutal as their words. Will you cease annoying me, Camilla! "

" You imagine " — Camilla wrenched open the door — " you imagine that I'm trying to annoy you. How strange! "

" Oh, you've a poisonous tongue and a poisonous manner; I'm dreadfully ashamed of you."

" Indeed? " Camilla stopped and faced her friend challengingly.

" Yes," Olive sat up, nodding wrathfully. " I'm ashamed and deceived and disappointed. You've a coarse soul. Oh," she groaned, " I want kindness, friendship, pity; pity, pity, most of all, pity. I cannot bear it." She flung herself again to the couch and sobbed forlornly.

" Very well, Olive, I will leave you. Good night."

Olive did not reply and Camilla passed out of the room to the front door and opened that. For

a moment she stood there, silently gazing into the night. Then: "O," she said, "how beautiful, Olive!" She came back into Olive's room and stood with one hand grasping the edge of the door, looking timidly at her friend. "There's a new moon and a big star and a thin fog over the barley field. Come and see."

She went out again to the porch and Olive rose and followed her. "See," cried Camilla, "the barley is goose-necked now, it is ripe for cutting."

Olive stood staring out long and silently. It was exquisite as an Eden evening, with a sleek young moon curled in the fondling clouds; it floated into her melancholy heart. Sweet light, shadows, the moon, the star, the long hills, the barley field, they twirled in her heart with disastrous memories of Willie Macmaster, Edgar Salter, Hercules and Count Filippo. All lost, all gone now, and Quincy Pugh was going to marry the gardener.

"Shall I come with you, Camilla? Yes, I can't bear it any longer; I'll come with you now, Camilla, if you'll have me."

Camilla's response was tender and solicitous.

"I'll tell Quincy," said Olive, "she and Luke can have this cottage, just as it is. I shan't want it ever again! They can get married at once." Ca-

milla was ecstatic. "And then will you tell me, Camilla," said Olive, taking her friend's arm, "all about . . . all about . . . those men?"

"I will, darling; yes, yes, I will," cried Camilla. "Oh, come along."

A SHARP DRY RADIANT EVENING, THE APRIL moon seraphically beaming upon Brindon town. A long thin shadow from the church steeple lay across the square pointing like a dart to the statue of the seventeenth-century flockmaster who had built all those almshouses for seven ancient men and six ancient women — God bless the odd one — and the flockmaster's shadow pointed in its turn to the fountain which had a round trough for horses, a dip for dogs, a tiny stoop for children, and was so small altogether that it had no shadow worth mentioning and so ended the line like a large fullstop. Though the shops were shut and the town lamps were not lit it was easy to perceive names and signs, it was light enough to read small posters, for there was Marion Clark standing with her bicycle reading all about a dance at the Alexander Rooms. To-night! To-night! Young laughing people across the square were hurrying into the ballroom adjacent to the inn, in front of which stood a pillar surmounted by a dumpy white bear carrying a bunch of gilded grapes in its teeth. Marion could see the bear, it was looking at her, could see it as plain as she could see her own shoes. They were black and she was dressed in mourning black

that vaguely suggested widowhood; she was young, and the moonlight bloomed upon her pale face that mingled weariness, or a little petulance, with its fragile beauty.

Turning from the contemplation of so much impending jollity she was about to cycle home to Teckle, two miles away, when a hand clutched her arm: "Ha! ha!" and a tall elderly man in a heavy black coat that reached to his boots, and huge gloves that reached to his elbows, said: "Steady, now! Is it Marion? Yes, good evening!"

"Colonel! How do you do?" He had a grey moustache guarded by two terrific wrinkles and a voice like a pilot.

"My soul, but this is lucky you know, does one good. Off to Teckle?"

"Yes, Colonel, I am just going home."

"So am I. Let's shy your bicycle in the car, shall we? Hooray! It's just over here."

He took the bicycle and they crossed the square together.

"My soul, this moonlight! Isn't it? Ah, yes, does one good."

The colonel's car stood outside the Alexander Rooms, people were arriving two and two.

How kind and splendid Colonel Badger had always been to her since she had met him three

months ago! That was when her dear husband had been killed in a motor accident and the colonel who had commanded her husband's regiment — the forty something — during the war, the colonel himself had actually attended the funeral, although her husband had only been a sergeant, and had looked after things in such a beautiful way. Even as the coffin was being lowered into the grave Marion had actually seen a tear fall from his eyes. That was true chivalry, and it touched Marion's heart. Moreover, the colonel continued to look after things in a beautiful way, for of course her husband's death had impoverished her, hopelessly. He had been a district agent in a petroleum company, and the compensation she had been awarded for the tragic accident was only a hundred and twenty a year, so she could not continue to live in a town or in the style his income had afforded. How cruel it all was, it was not right, everything had been against her, there was nothing inevitable about it at all, it was just the perversity of — of fate. The crucifix she had once used she had discarded, hidden it away; she was too bitter with God. When she had to move from the town it was the colonel who had found a cottage for her in his own village where he was Lord of the Manor and so forth. Now she was a sort of protégée of his and

he often invited her, sometimes her sister as well, to tea at his great house where she met his wife who suffered from St. Vitus's dance and had to be perambulated in a go-cart. How she got up and down stairs Marion did not know. The poor lady always wore most astonishing hats indoors, and she rolled her eyes and mumbled incomprehensible things and kept dropping her teacup to the floor, but the dear, devoted colonel always ignored the smashes and had relays of cups ready for her. They were the best china sort, too. Of course they ought to have been metal cups, but Marion never liked to suggest that.

While the colonel was settling the bicycle in the car Marion stood on the pavement gazing through the open doorway of the dance hall. How fascinating the music sounded. How happy all those couples must be!

"A dance," she exclaimed as the colonel finished. "Isn't it lively!"

"Oh! That's good. A dance! Er . . . shall we look at it for a moment or two?"

He peered at the clock in the car, then gazed at the rich moon on high.

"Ah, glorious, does one good. Come on," he growled, and stalked into the hall with Marion.

"How much?" he asked fiercely of the door-

keeper, and whatever it was he bought two tickets.

The hall was large, but as yet there were only about twenty couples dancing. The ladies were elegantly dressed, but the men, who looked like clerks and shopkeepers, were not so, and in all of them the enjoyment seemed a little strained.

"Now what the deuce is all this? Don't know any of these people, do you?" And the colonel went on talking very agreeably to Marion until at last he went across to a gentleman who seemed to have charge of the dancing.

"My friend is anxious to dance," said he to him, "but I myself do not dance. What can you do about that?"

The gentleman, who had a monocle and stiff upright hair, and kept on saying "*Pardonnez moi,*" followed Colonel Badger back to Marion who, doffing her coat and hat, was wafted away into a dance with the monocled man, and for an hour or more afterwards was lightly reeling on the arm of some perfectly idiotic male who said the idiotically perfect things to her, while Colonel Badger sat and watched and yawned, or went out to look at the motor-car, then back to the buffet to eat snacks that he thought were arid, sip drinks that he felt were sickening him, and smoked ciga-

rettes that bedevilled his brain. And all the while Marion was gay and enchanted with life.

"I say, you know," the colonel said at last, "we ought to be going."

So Marion put on her things again and they left the hall. Much higher hung the moon now, the shadows were shorter and slanted diagonally across the square. Neither of them spoke on the homeward journey, but Marion was in a happier mood than she had been for a long time. Living remotely in the country made widowhood even less supportable, for there were simply no distractions and so many occasions for nursing a grief that she was sure would never leave her. She was growing old; she was nearly twenty-six and had been married five years; a mother, too, with a darling little son, Joe, and now she was a widow, and mature as any duchess in her pride and dignity. Yes, she was. But the dreary prospect! A long phalanx of years stretching diminishingly, like stiff wooden soldiers that you knocked down accidentally one at a time until there were no more left. Marion's hair was dark and short, it waved in lovely masses over her brow and neck and ears. Indolent grace pervaded all her charms; she was slender, with a sort of Egyptian slimness; but her nerves were so strained — it was a penalty you

had to pay for conscious superiority — that she was often peevish and bitter; when she laughed it was with an almost silent hysteria, a joyless convulsion that rocked her whole body. Whenever she remembered her dead husband she wept, but she did not often think of him. After all, it was she who suffered, he was beyond her reach, beyond all, and the burden was hers to bear. So she thought most often of a sorrow that was herself, and that too with pity and a flow of tears. Alas, she was one of those million romantic-souled women who suffer profoundly from the discordant impact of their surroundings and even their own families; who sometimes imagine that their own mothers must have had a love affair with a nobleman, a viscount or a baronet at least, and that they themselves are the distinguished result of that infidelity. Discontent, laziness, a desire for dominance, a preoccupation with the idea of unchastity, fill the minds of these unhappy women, who are usually petted by their families, contemplate suicide, and spend hours in bewailing the misfortune that their real father — the rich and titled unknown — has somehow eluded their grasp.

The motor stopped at a small thatched cottage standing sideways to the road, looking into its own garden that was next door and had white

wooden palings. Behind this fence grew a file of six gooseberry bushes with spurs as stiff as forks, and two slim trees, a plum and a pear, which would soon be covered with the delicious delicate bloom that in some way nurtured tough and forbidding fruits; tulips, sunflowers, lilies would bloom there in their glory later on. Now, in the moonlight, the garden was bare enough, though its nudity was gracious.

Marion stepped down: "Thank you for such a jolly evening; it has been most splendid."

The colonel hauled out her bicycle and stood it inside the gateway. Then he took Marion's hand and held it a long time; that was stupid of him.

"Everything going on all right?" he asked tenderly.

"O yes," replied Marion, "yes."

"Little son all right?"

"Yes."

"Nice little chap."

"Oh, he's such a joy, the comfort of my life."

"Splendid!" said Colonel Badger. "Yes, don't coop yourself up, you know. Come out and break away from things. It will all come right, if you let it. Come up to tea to-morrow?"

"O dear, but I can't. I . . . We've got a tiresome visitor coming."

"Humph, yes," sighed the colonel, gazing at heaven, "It's cold, but ach! what moonlight, what moonlight! 'Pon my soul, but it does you good. Well, see you sometime?"

"O yes."

"Soon?"

Curse the man! She dragged her hand away.

"Oh, quite soon. Good night, Colonel."

Br-r-r-r! Poof! And he was gone.

Behind the yellow curtains in the latticed panes shone a pink light. The door opened straight into Marion's sitting-room. Supper was on the table, a square oak table with a cloth thrown diagonally upon it. The floor was tiled and covered here and there with rush mats. There was an open hearth with logs burning upon it. A black beam nestled in the ceiling, the walls were russet brown, there were several white doors and a settee near the fire was covered with a glaring pattern of green chintz. Much of the furniture still had a wedding-present sort of look about it. On the settee Rose lay dozing. To comfort Marion in her bereavement Rose Ransome, her unmarried sister, had thrown up her job — she was a typist — and had come to live with Marion for a few months, but already the patient Rose was afflicted by the melancholy of Marion and the monotony of Teckle. Each day

was a hard-boiled-egg of a day that you had to make up your mind to swallow unflinchingly.

" I've been to a dance with the colonel, Rose! "

Rose sat up, yawning madly. " Want any supper? "

" And I danced with a most fascinating man."

Her eyes were briskly beaming as she told Rose all about it: the colonel, the dance, the fascinating man.

" And he's coming here to-morrow! "

" What for? "

" Tea." Marion then sat down to a supper of cold bacon and beer.

" His name is Rosslyn Teague, he writes novels and lives in a caravan. Gracious, look at me eating, Rose; I've an appetite like a donkey. It's near Brinton now, and I've heard of his books. I saw something in the paper about him the other day, but I can't remember what."

" Don't shout so." Rose was sleepy and Marion's voice was shrill. " You'll wake Joe up."

" The darling! Is he all right? "

" Of course he is."

2

The man duly came to tea. Rosslyn Teague was one of those men about whom you can define noth-

ing; he was neither tall nor short, fat nor thin, young nor old, handsome nor ugly. A small dark moustache and large teeth were what first impressed Rose; his eyes were a little ironical, so was the tilt of the fawn hat he wore. He had a brown belted raincoat, a walking-stick, his trousers were turned up at the bottom and his socks were speckled blue. As he passed through the low doorway he knocked his head against the lintel. Marion wailed: "It's such a tiny, tiny house, too tiny, but beggars can't be choosers and besides . . ." She chattered on: "We are poor, but I do assure you we are honest."

"Honesty," said the man Teague in a deepish voice as he cast off his coat and handed it to Rose, "flatters no one. Ha, ha, ha! God's sorrow on it, it's an anachronism." And soon he was sitting on the settee, warming his hands at the fire as if . . . well, as if he owned the place. That was the nice thing about Rosslyn Teague, you could not help being familiar with him, somehow, straightway. He was a comfort. Of course they talked, as Marion intended they should, about books, for Marion was a great reader; she had to be, what else could one do when the people you had in sheer desperation to consort with were so uncouth, so unintelligent, mean and pitiless, absolute carrion?

She loved reading about passion and talking about passion. Best of all she liked stories of powerful devastating men — it did not matter who wrote them — or of fascinating women who reduced their lovers to a state of abject madness. And Thackeray! Oh, the adorable Becky!

Rose prepared tea and, having served it to Teague and Marion who sat at the table, she sat on the settee with the little boy Joe reclining against her. Tall, blackhaired, she was altogether quietly lovely, of richer build than her sister, a year or two younger.

"But I hate your Thackeray," Teague was saying; "he's such a bore. Dickens now . . ."

"Oh, I hate your Dickens," retorted Marion; "he's one continual sob; he's planted such horrible onions all over his books."

"Pooh!" grinned Teague.

"Bah!" said Marion. "But you know, I've never read a book of yours. Shameful, isn't it? Would you lend me one?"

"Me too," Rose cried.

"Oh, Rose never reads." There was a breath of contempt in Marion's tone.

"No," Teague mused, rather disconcertingly. "No, she need not. She is herself a poem, a picture, a harmony."

Silently the girls sipped their tea. Little Joe, nestling on Rose's lap, patted her handsome bosom and whispered: "Pudding!"

"I'll give you each a book of mine," resumed Teague, "if you like. I'll bring them over."

When he stayed on to supper Marion apologized for the scrappiness of the meal, but Teague swore it was divine, and indeed he ate a great deal and drank a quantity of beer. It was a pleasant time. At his departure the two sisters stood in the doorway bidding him good night. He took Marion's hand: "Good night, Marion," he said, and she said, "Good night, Ross." They were standing close together and he kissed her. Marion kissed him too. He turned to her sister: "And Rose?" Rose turned her lips away from him, but he embraced and kissed her, as it seemed to Marion, far more fervently. Then he was gone.

"Bah!" snapped Marion as the door closed upon him.

Rose was silent.

"Say something!"

Rose only turned to the table and began to move the dishes.

"Every girl he meets!" Marion rubbed her lips with her handkerchief, "Faugh!"

"Well . . ." Rose was temporizing. "Why did you kiss him back?"

"Oh, shut up!"

"What's a kiss? I thought him nice; he wanted to cheer you, he saw that you were miserable."

"You're not miserable. You haven't a single passion, your thoughts are like cotton-wool."

Two afternoons later they strolled over to visit him and on the way were overtaken by Colonel Badger in his car, who gave them a lift as far as the field in which the caravan stood. There was a farmhouse near by and a dead walnut tree.

"*Ah, le bon Dieu!*" cried Teague, as they approached. He was clad in brown cord breeches with grey gaiters, a grey shirt, and there was a yellow muffler round his neck. "Hail, and enter!" They went up the little ladder and entered a dainty fairy place, green without and blue within, handsome cushions on a bench, stove no bigger than a hat box, all sorts of ingenious devices, and even small pictures on the walls. The pictures were of the sort one does not often see in private dwelling-places, does not want to see there, but Marion understood that such things are agreeable to artistic natures. While Teague was gone down the steps to fill a kettle Rose stared at them and com-

mented and giggled. "Don't," Marion admonished her. Marion understood such things, she had been married, and even if she had not been married she would have understood.

"Who was the cavalier in the car?" inquired Teague when he had put the kettle on the stove. Cigarettes for them? Marion explained that he was the dear sweet old friend, the colonel, she had already told him of.

"Huh! he's such a fussy old fool," protested Rose scoffingly, "a perfect old loon, fuss, fuss, fuss. Look at the way he hooshed us about at the funeral, as if we were a lot of soldiers or sheep! Lord, he did; shoving us into the right pews and snuffling and sneezing all over everybody — he'd got a beast of a cold. O dear, when he bent over the grave, there was a drip on the end of his nose — it fell down with such a whack."

"Rose! Please! Don't!"

"Now he makes eyes at her," pursued Rose, turning to Teague.

Marion sighed forlornly; it was unbearable.

"I can't stand him," insisted Rose; and she made fun of his wife, his house, his speech, and to Marion's astonishment Teague seemed to enjoy such vulgarity. Would no one ever understand the delicacy of her superior nature?

They left the caravan soon after tea and Teague walked a part of the way home with them, leading them just through the farm-yard where a man straddled on a bank of dung was pumping water into an ox trough; the stalls were littered with dead bracken, hens were couched under the mangers, and pigs were foraying for offal.

"Good evening," said Teague to the man. "A squall coming?"

"Ah," the man sighed.

Yes, the evening clouds were extraordinary, Marion mused as they paced along the road; the white, delicate, sunlit ones, and that huge, black, sprawling monster with thunder groping in it like a storm in the bowels of Tophet.

"Ah," she declared, "love is like that."

"Then save me from love!" ejaculated Teague. "Your visions! your thoughts! O dear, what a mind you have!"

Marion looked at him in dismay. "Why, why do you always abuse and deride me?"

"But I don't." He was very gay about it. "I don't deride, I adore you."

He kissed them both then and there and went back to his caravan. The sisters fetched little Joe from the neighbour who had temporarily taken charge of him, and for the rest of the evening they

were morose. They stayed up late, Marion was not tired, it was hateful to go to bed.

When Teague came again — for of course he came and was to come often — he was merry and boisterous and played games with little Joe and wrestled with Rose for the possession of him. After tea he produced two of his books, one called *Time and Trouble* and the other *Clementine's Desire*.

"Which will you have?" he asked Rose.

"I don't mind," said she.

Marion picked up both books and fluttering over the leaves of each in turn said: "I shall have *Clementine*. And do write something in it, won't you?"

He sat down and with the flourish of a man signing the pay-roll of an army wrote *Rosslyn Teague* on the fly-leaf. Marion took the book to the settee and lying there began to read it rapidly, while Rose and Teague with the child between them played draughts at the table.

Presently Rose murmured: "Write something in my book."

"Yes? What shall I write?"

"What you like," said Rose.

"Anything I like?"

"Yes," said Rose.

He opened the copy of *Time and Trouble,* and wrote:

To Rose. With Love, from Ross.

"Oh!" cried she, and she put out her hand and pressed his.

"What has he written?" inquired Marion languidly.

"Look!" Rose offered her the book.

"Read it out," Marion demanded.

"No, you look," repeated her sister.

"I don't want to see it," Marion said, and resumed her reading. Rose shut the book and left it on the table. It was time for little Joe to go to bed, so she took him upstairs, undressed him, and stayed with him until he was asleep in his bed. Marion went to the table, picked up the book called *Time and Trouble* and read the inscription.

To Rose. With Love, from Ross.

She flung the book down and seized Teague fiercely by the arm.

"Sit over here," she commanded, half dragging him to the settee, and sitting down beside him. "I will not have you philandering and fooling with Rose. I will not. Do you hear? Why do you flatter

her and turn her head like . . . like this? It's disgraceful and mean; she's a fool. Can't you see?"

"I see she is rather beautiful," Teague said.

"What! Do you think so? Perhaps . . . if only her face had been oval."

"But it *is* oval."

"No, it is round. Mine is oval."

"No, but yours is round."

"Oh, how can you?" Marion turned her head in disgust. "Now, remember, I won't have it. She is in my care. Do you hear?" she queried hotly.

"Yes, I hear. It's true, what you say; you're quite right. But . . . but you, you are young and blooming, too."

"There's a difference, I've been married, and so have you. It is different."

"Indeed! What difference? Do you mean I may 'philander' with you?" Teague asked it calmly, as if he had been asking the time.

"She's young, with all the innocent bloom on her, and altogether too easily swayed. Difference, why, it is obvious!"

"To whom, Marion?"

"Anybody; most of all to a man of intelligence and — I don't doubt — experiences."

"Not to a moralist like me. May I philander with you?"

"A moralist! You! Be quiet. You have no morals, you're a genius."

Teague was amused, if only diffidently so.

"But you are," she murmured.

"O Marion! Don't put that on me. May I philander with you? May I?"

"No, you may not."

"Ah!" Teague flung his arms around her. "I shall love you better than anything."

"I know you're a rascal, Ross, a brute, a beast, a philanderer," said Marion Clark; but she was an acquisitive woman, and so, with the tears just drying on her widow's cheeks, she bent over him, called him her sweetheart and pinned a flower in his coat. They could hear Rose, still upstairs, murmuring the infant to sleep.

"Will you come to see me?" whispered Teague. "Alone?"

"Don't you like my sister then?" Marion asked, quite loudly.

"Come alone?" he insisted, more softly than before.

"You're not to be trusted. No. And my situation — you see? It would be improper, people would think evil of me."

"I should not."

"My dear!" she murmured. "But you're not to be trusted — and I could not trust myself."

Marion closed her eyes against his breast, tingling with turbulent shame. No, not yet. Oh, perhaps, yes; someday, yes, soon; indeed soon. He told her all his tender thoughts of her, urging his fond desire, and when the urgency offended her he was offended too. Rose came down at last. Then they were sitting coolly apart.

"Lay the table, Rose; Ross is staying to supper."

3

Marion would not go to the caravan, so Teague came to Marion — almost every evening as she had begged him to. To honour these occasions she would buy a bottle of burgundy or some other wine, and it was astonishing how easily Teague consumed it, for the sisters scarcely sipped a drop. Every evening he would visit them, and Marion, noting his fondness for wine, always provided some, as well as dainty dishes for supper. In a month her household bills had mounted up to a terrifying figure, incredibly startling but incontestable; her small income could not possibly support such an expenditure. Oh, it was cruel, embittering,

horrible! Some economies were possible, some personal luxuries were resigned, and though the cost was still alarming, the young widow went on paying the price of her pride. Teague seemed to be blissfuly unaware of her small resources; it is true he often came with a bottle of wine concealed in his pocket, but Marion could not restrain her desire to feed him well when he came — and he came often — because she was sure he did not live properly in that caravan, on bread and cheese and tins of corned beef. How pathetic the man was — his little kettle! his little stove! But at night she was haunted by the cost of that suave dementing wine; she could not do without the man, in his absence she was as restless as a bee in a window; he was all her solace, all her joy — but his appetite was ruining her. What could she do? Ah, pride and love! All she did for him did not advance their intimacy one jot, they were where they started, indeed he seemed to be receding and she dared not abate her outlay. Worst of all she had a sour absurd suspicion that he was playing fast and loose on some secret occasions with Rose, though she could not detect them. Oh, Rose was subtle as a snake, but Marion would not let her out of her sight. The sisters bickered, there was enmity between them, but one caress from Ross would

soothe all Marion's jealous fears and she would be happy and careless even of her debts. What the outcome would be she could not guess. Teague tried no more to persuade her to meet him, they were never alone together for more than a few minutes — Rose! Rose! — but at night she would lie in a fever of love: "Oh, why not pay your passion the tribute of all its claims?" But she could not; perhaps Rose was more courageous? If Ross still praised her sister, her beauty, industry, patience, Marion could always deride Rose's intelligence.

"Oh, she is empty-headed, no brains, she reads the stupidest books. . . ."

"She reads mine!" interrupted Teague.

"Only because she knows you; she does not appreciate them, she has no taste, I wish she had. I try my best with her but she hasn't a single passion, her thoughts are like cotton-wool. What can you make of a girl who speaks of Ruskin's *Stones of Venus?* Sickening!"

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed Teague, and Marion laughed, too.

"Ho! ho!" roared Teague.

"Don't, Ross!" Really, he seemed to like Rose the more for such deplorable foolery. It was no consolation that he laughed just as much at

Marion, he was always in opposition to her, and they often quarrelled, not obtusely but with a half-disguised raillery.

"Why do you two nag so?" Rose suddenly asked one day. "You are like two cockerels. You're not fair to her, Ross; she is clever and has such a sweet nature."

"Thank you, Rose," cried Marion; "but I'm quite able to defend myself — when the necessity arises."

And then one lovely June evening she had gone off with the colonel to supper at his house. She knew Ross was coming to the cottage, she had invited him; indeed he would come whether or no, but before he arrived the colonel had come in his car and whisked her off. For a while she enjoyed the thought of Ross's chagrin, but the pleasure soon wilted. Rose had stopped at home to mind the infant; in her eagerness to wound him she had overlooked the consequence that Ross and Rose would be alone a whole evening together, a happiness she herself had never secured. Oh, with what fury she repented of her hastiness, loathing her own stupidity more and more as the evening crawled and crept. Her mind darkened in its shocking imaginations: Rose smiling at Ross; Ross — she dared not think. It almost made her

shriek at the Colonel's persistence in detaining her so late, so dangerously, booming and baaing about his cursed china, his filthy books, his prints, and his gramophone with the millions of records that made her sick — nowhere in the world was there such an awkward oaf-like maniac.

When she did get home Ross was gone, and oh, she was filled with as much bitterness and sorrow and jealousy and misgivings as if he were gone for ever and she was never to see him again. And there was another long bill from the shopkeeper awaiting her. It was impossible to go on thus, utterly, tragically impossible! She adored him, her love, he was marvellous; but she could not win him, and all the bitterness of defeat flared out against her sister. Rose sat knitting: Rose was stupid. She was bigger, healthier, stronger, there was a sweet bloom upon her. And she ate like a horse. Like a horse, thought Marion savagely as she fingered that deplorable bill. God, what burdens I have to bear, how unjust and cruel everything is! If she would only go I could manage; I could save everything, I could be happy, at ease; yes, I would be alone with him.

"What did you do all the evening?" she inquired lightly, smiling.

"Oh, nothing much," answered Rose.

"You told him where I was gone?"

"Yes — didn't you want me to?"

"Was he angry?"

"No."

"What did he say?"

"Nothing."

"Rose — is that true? What did you do all the evening?"

"We talked and had supper and talked."

"Is that all — only talked? Humph! What an opportunity wasted!"

"What?" There was an acrid tone in Rose's voice.

Marion punched the hat pin into her hat and dashed it on the settee. "Bah! I don't trust him, no, I wouldn't trust him," she bitterly exclaimed, "nor you either, I wouldn't trust you."

Rose was silent, malignantly silent.

"Don't pretend," continued Marion.

Rose burst out: "You're jealous. Why did you go with the colonel? You trust him."

"Oh, the blasted idiot! It's easy to talk of jealousy, and deceit is easy. Oh, it is very, very easy. Why did Ross go?"

"You must ask him. If you want him," added Rose, coolly sneering, "why don't you have him; why don't you go with him, and not keep hinting

things of me! Why don't you go with him 'stead of vacillating about like a sheep! He'll have you — if he's that sort."

"That sort! Yes, I do, I do want him, I do; I'm sick of other girls having the man I want, bad or no. This is a man I love and you are stealing him, you are in the way, can't you see! Leave us alone, clear off, go back where you came from!"

"I will," said Rose instantly. "It's time I did; I can't stay with you any longer; I'd made up my mind. I've got to go, and I'll go to-morrow."

"O no, no, no, Rose! I'm harassed, I'm mad and half ruined. Look at that bill."

"I'm going to-morrow," said Rose emphatically. "I've got to go. I must go."

And in the morning Rose departed. Marion tearfully bade her good-bye and the motor-bus took her to the station.

Then Marion waited all day, she waited for the evening and the evening came. There was a piercing lustre in the light, as if the hastening sun shone with vanity. Each stalk of grass glistened like a hair, every curve in the surrounding pastures was touched by a shadow and every shadow was emphatic. So bright the air, and so alluring the little garden with its plot of grass, its ambush of shrubs, its lilac and stalks of roses and bower of orchard

shade. But Marion shivered, her spirit was sick. In the doorway at last it grew cold, and the floor was gruff under her footsteps. Ross had not come, and he did not come.

The next evening, she put the child to bed and hurried over to the caravan. It was gone, oh, it was gone, and Rose was gone!

There was treachery in that sister, horrible; her fears had been right after all; and Ross was gone, following Rose the fraud, Rose the impostor, without a sign, no sign but this emptiness, though he knew she would die for him. But it was Rose's perfidy that stung, not his. Never, never, never would she again meet or receive that sly, faithless ignoble creature, not if she were dying. Let her die, she would be glad, she would befriend her no more. After all these months of keeping her, feeding her; cherishing her, almost to the point of ruin — oh, the deadly ingratitude! Let her not write to her; she would not answer a single letter, not one, not even if she were dying; she would burn them all unopened. By God, she would burn Rose too! It was almost dark when she wandered home. Pale moths fluttered against her face; the stars were faint in the sky, not so clear as the gentle glitter in the grass where glow-worms hung. At home the house seemed filled with desolation. Weeping, she

beat her hands together. What could she do in a world so remorselessly empty. " O you must pray and entreat God, my friend." She took a candle up to her bedroom and sought in the chest for the hidden crucifix on its chain of jet. The child, wide-eyed, watched her as she tumbled the things about.

" Mum," he said.

" Go to sleep, now, go to sleep," she said wearily. Thoughts of Ross and Rose swirled through her mind. Where were they, what were they doing, now, at this moment? She could not cease to bewail the wicked nature of her sister.

" Mum," the startled child called, " there's a daddy longlegs here."

" Go to sleep," gasped the distracted woman, " or I'll make it eat you."

But then she flung herself beside him, gathered him to her thin breasts and begged him to forgive her. When she had sung him to sleep she tossed the crucifix back into the chest and crept downstairs. There was Ross's book upon the shelf, and beside it, yes, the book he had given to Rose; Rose had forgotten it! Faugh! Marian read the inscription:

To Rose. With Love, from Ross.

and tore out the horrible page; she destroyed it. There was her own book, the one he had given her.

All he had written on the page was *Rosslyn Teague,* so bare, so formal. There was an image in her mind of what should have been written there, tender and sweet. Marion got out the pen and the inkstand. Sitting at the table she wrote and scratched and altered that cold inscription, imitating as carefully as she could the beloved handwriting, until the page fairly glowed.

To Marion (it read now)
With fondest love from
Ross.
O lyric love, half angel and half bird,
And all a wonder and a wild desire.

Lifting the book to her lips she kissed the page. "I know, I know, I know he loved me, but why did he go with her? Oh, how vain it all is," mourned the weeping woman. "I'm dethroned before I was crowned."

And she could not cease bewailing the wicked nature of her sister.

THE FUNNEL

HENRY LAPWING WAS A SMALL PALLID BOY who grew into a small pallid person with thick red lips and very dark eyes. When he began to be a man a black moustache presumed to grow on him, and he let it grow. It bore, you might say, a charmed life, for the hair of his head began then to decline, until at thirty there was a bare baldness on him as big as a little saucer; at forty it was the shape of a little shovel. That is how he was now, Henry Lapwing, a timid man, not afraid of anything actual like pain or misfortune or people, but afraid, just simply, of life itself, something he could not name. Railway clerks, especially those of the lower grades, are often like that. He was, too, an unreflective man; it was enough to have survived so many years; most of his experiences were forgotten as soon as their momentary turbulence, pleasant or otherwise, had subsided; he had almost entirely forgotten his childhood. There was just one time he could remember of those far-off days, a summer morning when he was six or seven years old; he was rambling in a country lane, very sunny it was, he could smell something. Then he came upon two men lounging in a ditch, and beside them squatted a bear, a large black bear! Both men must have been Swiss — they had such fine

sweeping moustaches and pink faces, and they were wearing conical velvet hats. One was playing on a clarionet, the other was feeding the bear with a piece of bread and jam. It had a chain on its muzzle. It was very sunny and he could smell the bear. Such claws it had!

And that is all about the bear. He had not been afraid of it, he had never been afraid of anything, but at school he was so stupid that if a boy playfully knocked him over Henry would remain on the ground and say " Don't! " so pathetically that his assailant would cease to annoy him. And so when he grew up and engaged in the most serious hazard of life by marrying a high-spirited Irish girl who soon treated him in a similar way, Henry merely said " Don't! " Instead of stamping upon his meek, pale face his wife permitted him to live — but not with her, not any longer. They had no children — Bridget could not forgive him that; and he had no ambitions. Bridget was full of ambition, and she had no child. She would not, she said, put up with it any longer. She would have, she said, no more to do with him. Bridget her name was, and she bade him leave her and seek his lot elsewhere. It did not fall to Henry to contest her dispensation — she was a substantial Hibernian — and he went that same night; it had all hap-

pened over supper, very unpleasant and very inconvenient. Henry forsook her and went seeking, and though he never found what you might call a fortune he did invent a funnel, a very peculiar adjustable funnel, a funnel which . . . but that was a long while after this affair.

The first emotion that engaged Henry after he had secured lodgings with a man who was a plumber by day and a Socialist by night (his wife and numerous children being neither the one nor the other), the very first emotion that engaged Henry was an anxiety about Bridget's fidelity. Henry had no jealous qualms at all, and he knew Bridget had none, but he also knew that Bridget hadn't any means, that she was alone, that she was attractive (ten years younger than himself), that she pined for a child — well, I ask you? How she proposed to live he did not know, and indeed he was far from caring, except for just one thing — that she should "keep straight." That was essential to him. Pride, I suppose it was.

A night or two after their separation he went round to their old home. It was a very little house in a very long street, 72 Turnbull Street; there were seventy-one more houses exactly like it, and seventy-two others, taking it all in all, not so very dissimilar — just a gross of them. At the end of

the street, behind a hedge and some trees, was an open space often occupied by a "fair" with a couple of roundabouts, some swings, and a coco-nut-shy. It was there now; he could see the glare of the naphtha lamps and hear the interminable melancholy drone of the organ pleading to an audience too meagre for mirth and too poor for patronage. In front of every Turnbull house there grew a railed garden with evergreens and a concrete path; each had a window upstairs, a window and a door below, and No. 72 had the gaslamp facing it, so there was never a candle required at bedtime — not if you left the blind up.

Henry paced up and down the path a few moments before knocking; an autumn night it was, the leaves of the evergreens were quite chill, and the wind blew. When Bridget answered his knock she exclaimed:

"Oh," very slowly; "Henry!"

"I come for my overcoat," said he.

"Well, come in for your overcoat, you."

In the kitchen she helped him on with his overcoat, but then he sat down. The kitchen looked exactly the same, it had not altered at all. Nor had Bridget, the red-haired, big-bosomed creature. Handsome as a marigold.

"How are you getting on?"

" I'm well," said she; and she looked very well with her hands on her fine hips: it was in the days when women had small waists and wore tight bodices. A smile of contemptuous contentment she gave: " I'm well."

Henry told her where he had gone to dwell now, and so on.

" How," he then asked her, " are you going to manage? "

" I'll manage," Bridget declared.

" What are you going to do? "

" Oh, I'll manage," said she.

" Keeping the house on? "

" God help you, what else can I do? But I don't want you in it."

" I dunno," said he. " I suppose you'll want money? "

" No," Bridget said, " none of yours, and I don't want you."

" I'll have to share my salary with you," said Henry.

" I'll not be wanting that."

" But . . . you must have money! "

" Wouldn't I earn it? "

" How? " Henry did not look at Bridget while he interrogated her. All he desired to convey was the notion that he did not want on his conscience

the crime of having sent a woman to the devil. There was nothing offensive in that. But he could not explain, not to Bridget, why he thought that was her inevitable destination; it was not the kind of thing for a follower of Christianity. Besides she was growing furious again.

"You want to keep a holt on me, do you! Well then, I'll not have it. It's my independence I want, not you or your money at all, do you see that!"

Half of the furniture had been provided by Bridget, a good half, but some was his, and so, although he did not want it, he wondered.

"How are you going to earn money?"

"I've my plans."

What a cunning woman she was, but Henry was not to be fobbed off.

"Are you going out to a job?"

"I am not."

"What job can you do here?"

"Why! Is it to do with you at all?"

Henry was silent. "Eh?" asked Bridget.

He took the plunge and said meaningly: "Oh, I know it is easy for a woman to get money, it's easy for a woman to go wrong."

"Go wrong!" she shouted. "Why, what's on you, you dirty rot-sock? If you weren't the fool of

the world you'd know I'm be going to let lodgings to the young girls at the factory, good and decent, if you're wanting to know. I'll get three or four, may be; there's a score I could have if I liked, but three or four will do me neat and nice. An' that's how I'll keep the grace of God on my bones, if you're wanting to know, and no dirty capers. Yah, why'd I bother about what you think!"

No, no, Henry declared, he was only animated by kind intentions.

"Kind! Yah, I know you! It's to wash your little mushy soul in your own spittle, that's all."

"And," he ventured mildly, "you may not be as lucky as you think for. You might have an illness, or be swindled, there's that. And you won't work for ever, there's old age."

"Age!" Oh, but it was ridiculous talking of age to a brisk woman in her early prime.

"Yes, or I might die too," he went on.

"You'll never live to match Methuselah."

"Some people live longer than others," sighed Henry; "I don't know for why. And this money will be nest-egg. I'm fixed on that, you must have it. I'm fixed on that."

"Not a graineen. You may take your nest-egg,"

said Bridget, " and pay old Scratch. So don't sit there picking your nose, be off now — or must I take the poker to ye? "

That was not necessary.

Well, for the satisfaction of Henry's soul it did not matter what Bridget said about the allowance, or what she did with it; the debt would be paid, and the payment would absolve him. Folly? Oh, it was indeed! But Folly is a prison where no charter of deliverance ever comes. So every week he sent her the money and at last Bridget, tired of ineffectual protests, put the money in a bank. It was a strain, a great strain, but the notable thing about Lapwing was that nothing could really daunt him, he could adapt himself to the turn of fortune when fortune took a bad turn. He had lost Bridget, lost home, resigned half his income, but his boots were always well-heeled and his collar was clean for the most of the week. You could notice no difference in him, but there was no denying it was a great sacrifice, it pulled him down, it almost annihilated him, and all his thoughts turned on ways of acquiring some wealth in some easy fashion — lotteries, competitions, gambling, and the like. All these methods were utterly beyond his means, but there was an astonishing section of things, so he heard, which would fetch you a hundred pounds if you

could accomplish any one of them. If you could, for instance, smoke a whole cigar without damaging the ash, you would get a hundred pounds for that (from some American). Or if you found and produced without damage a kingfisher's nest, you would get a hundred pounds (from the British Museum). Or a million omnibus tickets would fetch you a hundred pounds (from some hospital) — only the tickets must be all different. The world was full of such violent enigmatic beliefs. And there were certain sorts of foreign stamps. In his boyhood Henry had collected foreign stamps; he kept them, he had still got them, they were in a little book with a brown embossed cover and yellow leaves. Now and again he looked at them, wondering what he could do about them. He did nothing.

Not from one year's end to the other did he set eyes on Bridget; he was as friendless a man as you could wish — as they say — to meet in a day's march. Each week he wrapped the half of his money in an envelope and dropped it into her letter-box. Whether she was doing well or ill he did not know, he fancied she was thriving, and to be sure she was still living in No. 72 Turnbull Street. At odd times, on Saturday afternoons, he would go to watch a football match which the

Locomotive Club played against some other station, but even then he would be alone; no one accompanied, and no one accosted him as he stood on the field with his little legs wide apart, his hands in his trousers pockets, his pince-nez cunningly perched, his face frowning. Sometimes his wan cheeks would fluster into a pink, his fists would grind in his pockets, and forgetting his isolation he would shout quite loudly: "Where are your eyes, referee? Can't you see, damn you? What are you up to?" And although neither the referee nor the players regarded him at all, the spectators would observe him and imagine him to be the very devil of a judge of a true football match, and they too would begin to bellow at the referee.

Two years after he had left Bridget Henry went one morning to the barber's. The barber was a Swiss, he reminded Henry of the men with the bear he had seen when a child, he was just such another — barring the hat and the bear and the clarionet — and that was the reason why Henry patronized his saloon. As he entered the barber was replenishing a paraffin lamp with oil, and the oil overflowed because he could not see beyond the funnel he was using.

"Blast it," muttered the barber. "Good morning."

Henry said good morning and hung up his hat.

The barber wiped his hands upon his apron and hung up the lamp.

"Hair cut?" demanded the Swiss.

"Yes," said Henry meditatively, and the barber began to crop the little hair Henry did not want. As he sat there Henry invented in his mind a funnel that would prevent any such mishaps; invented it complete, it was most ingenious, an inspiration, he saw the solution at once, plainly, as plainly as he smelt paraffin that seemed to be oozing from his hair.

"Shampoo?"

"What?" asked the dreaming inventor.

The Swiss put his thick forefinger on a show-card: SHAMPOO, 5*d*. "Good for debauchery," he declared acridly, staring at Henry in the mirror, "and profligacy."

Henry was baffled. "I'm all right," he whispered.

"If your head aches," the barber continued, "shampoo is very beneficial."

"It don't ache," Henry said. "I don't drink, and I don't have anything to do with women."

For the first time the barber now smiled at him, compassionately too.

"Aw, what they say? A nature's nobleman; full of virtue — and other vices."

"How much?" asked Henry, standing up and adjusting his pince-nez. He paid the barber his two pence and went hurriedly off to work.

Among sheaves of waybills and consignment notes he spent a harassing forenoon; there was always some merchandise missing or damaged or delayed; such things were his special province: a depot only two stations down the line had mislaid a ton and a half of marmalade, and a woman whose perambulator had been smashed in transit could not have stormed at Lapwing more violently if her baby had been smashed too. Nevertheless he managed to scratch numerous drawings of funnels upon odd pieces of paper, funnels and funnels, the new Idea, the Lapwing Adjustable Funnel. During the next few weeks he not merely tinkered with funnels, he lived and moved and had his being with funnels; then slept with them and dreamed of them, indeed he dreamed of one that was supremely useful in cases of debauchery and profligacy; you poured in virtue and it never overflowed; you poured in vice and it came out virtue. At last the thing was perfect; it worked: worked with any liquid. He tried it with milk, tried it with paraffin, with soup, cocoa, and codliver oil —noth-

ing could overflow. It only remained to get the thing manufactured and marketed.

What a difficulty that was! Here was a man with an implement of perfection, there was a public burning to experience its benefits. But Lapwing was a canny person; he was not so unwise as to show his invention to any living soul until he was protected from all chance of the beautiful idea being stolen from him, and that meant a large sum for patent fees. For a time the problem stupefied him; indeed he was almost tempted to poach on that half of his salary which he always gave to Bridget, but in the midst of his bewilderment the notion came to him that Bridget herself might be able to help. It was not *impossible* for her to have that much money; he would go to her and ask; if she failed him — well, no harm was done, he would think of something else. So off he went to Bridget.

Good Lord! she was astonishing; she had not aged an hour. Oh, she was full and fine and flourishing, with eight or nine girl lodgers; she had had to rent the next door house as well, she had to have a servant to help her; opulent she was, positively opulent!

"And what do *you* want?" she said when she saw him at her door.

"I want to show you something."

"You're thin," Bridget commented, "aren't you well? Come in here."

She took him into a very tidy parlour with a lot of new furniture in it.

"What do you want to show me?"

"My funnel," replied Henry, producing it. "And perhaps you could do me a favour."

The upshot was that Bridget — not as a favour, not as a speculation, but solely to get rid of him and keep clear of him, handed him twenty pounds. She actually wrote him a cheque for it.

Before he went away she told him very kindly that she did not want him to go on sending that weekly money to her, it was not necessary, and it was almost a nuisance now. But Henry was adamant about that: O yes, he must go on doing that — it signified.

"But can't you see," cried Bridget irritably, "that I've no call for it? Look at me, look at my furniture and my business and my servant!"

"No." Henry was immovable. "Responsibility is responsibility; right is right all the world over."

He went away with the twenty pounds and patented the funnel, and then it did not take long to find a firm which was so impressed by the possibilities of his invention that they, as it were, dis-

creetly darted at Henry and his funnel. They offered a handsome sum for it outright, but Lapwing would not sell, he would only give them a licence to manufacture it on royalty terms. With this they had to be content and do their best. Catby, Meagle and Timms was the firm, and they did magnificently. Before a year was gone the funnel was produced in brass, iron, tin, copper, zinc, and aluminum; it was displayed in shop windows, advertised in newspapers, billed on the hoardings, The Lapwing Adjustable Funnel, and success was such that Henry soon received a cheque for £100 on account of royalties.

The receipt of this threw him into a desperate perspiration lasting for an hour, after which the first thing he did was to ask Catby, Meagle and Timms to prepare a model of the funnel entirely of silver, and despatch it with his compliments to Mrs. Henry Lapwing, 72 Turnbull Street. Then he debated long on what best to do with that hundred pounds. Good God, what could he do with such a sum! It was so vast, so commanding, so pristine, it would be a sacrilege to break into it and spend a halfpenny of it! In the end he sent that, too, to Bridget, with a letter saying that it was her share of the proceeds of his invention; that he would now discontinue sending her the weekly sum.

That was the most gratifying outcome to Henry, he need not any longer share his income with Bridget — at any rate for a long time to come. Nothing could exceed the gratification of that; it was just like having his income doubled; he would be well off, never so well off in his life as now. With a twinge of guilt he remembered that a short time before his weekly salary had been increased by half-a-crown, and he had not shared it with Bridget. Responsibility was a good thing, a steadying thing, as no one could deny, but it was also a difficult thing. Now, for a couple of years at least his responsibility to Bridget was already discharged, the burden fallen from his shoulders, and his own income, in a sense, was doubled. He had done a splendid thing for himself; whichever way he looked at it he came out with profit.

Coincident with this agreeable state of affairs Lapwing was transferred to another station forty miles down the line, and he left his old town in winter without a word to Bridget, without a regret. Henry had no imagination, he could never see faces in the fire, and he lived as aptly in the new town as he had lived in the old. There was only one slight disturbing result: on chill dark nights when the wind seemed to hang in the great trees, he could sometimes faintly hear among their

uproar a music, far off, very very far off, thin but just audible, and he would lie in his bed striving to catch that echoing delight, for it was but an echo whose source was stupidly confused. The only music he could remember was the music of the organ on the fair ground at the bottom of Turnbull Street. A thousand times he had savoured its dispiriting tunes; they were never changed, but he had listened to their melancholy clamour, especially on windy nights, with a strange pleasure. Now again the flames of the naphthas would flicker in the gusty air, and he could recall how he had heard in that most musical quiet when the organ stopped, the scratching of rags of paper blowing along the gritty road.

At the end of his first year in the new town he received another cheque from Catby, Meagle and Timms; larger, much larger than before. Three hundred and fifty pounds! The walls of his world seemed to burn about him and break in cinders, while a golden palace reared up into the sky. But, alas, a letter from Catby himself contained tragic news. It appeared that the enormous success of the Lapwing Funnel had inspired many other inventors, and cheap imitations were now flooding the market; in particular there was a rival funnel which, being naturally automatic instead of scien-

tifically adjustable like the Lapwing, could be sold at less than half the price of Henry's invention. Messrs. Catby, while congratulating themselves and Henry upon their past success, now feared that unless he could devise a much cheaper funnel there was little prospect of any more royalties; in point of fact their sales had now practically ceased.

" I'm glad," murmured Henry when the shock had been partially absorbed, " damn glad I sent her that hundred pounds. I'd 'a been in a pretty pickle soon if I hadn't, shouldn't I? " Which reflection shows that Henry was contented with his lot, he had been beyond cares, he was enjoying life. So completely convinced was he of the rightness of his earlier action that he could now do no other than send the second cheque straight off to Bridget. By the time that was exhausted he would be somewhere within hail of retiring age, a pension, and then . . . ? Well, then he did not know; you could not get blood out of a stone, but at present it did not matter.

There was no reply from Bridget. For two years he had not seen her, for a whole year they had lived in different towns; he knew she was well, he was quite content, he was safe for seven or eight years at least.

How vain are all attempts to impose on des-

tiny! Within a few months Lapwing became disastrously involved in a conspiracy to defraud the railway company. He had been made the innocent tool of a set of villains, riff-raff of the uniformed staff, who had swindled the company through his unconscious compliance. It was impossible to suspect him, but his superiors could not see their way to entrust their affairs any longer to one so easily duped. Lapwing was discharged.

He was stoical at first, but after a week or two of unemployment he perceived that he was ruined, irretrievably ruined. Well on into middle age and discharged for incompetence! Black indeed was the outlook. One could not go on inventing funnels — there were no more to invent. Just when his resources were almost gone, and his mind had begun to glance furtively at the idea of all the money he had sent Bridget, he received a letter from the servant at Turnbull Street informing him that Bridget was ill, and suggesting his immediate attendance. At once he packed his belongings, burned his boats, left the tragic town for good and returned to Turnbull Street, not with any resolution, but with a vague hope.

It was dark in the evening when he got there. The servant who opened the door recognized him and exclaimed:

" Oh, sir, she's gone! "

" Gone? " Henry stared dubiously.

" Half-past four," wailed the girl, bursting into tears. Then Henry realized that his wife was dead. As he stood dazed in the doorway a familiar sound began to woo his ears, the sound of the organ on the fair ground at the bottom of the street. Bright and lively it sounded!

" Would you like to see her? " inquired the girl, wiping her eyes.

He walked in and stood his bag in the passage. The girl brought a lighted candle and showed him up to Bridget's room. The door was shut; the girl paused, looked at Henry, and then knocked very quietly upon the door. She began to weep again and handed the candlestick to the man.

" In there," she said, and watched him enter the room before she descended the stairs.

There was nobody in the room, nobody but himself and Bridget. She lay on the bed under a sheet. All the rites were done, a nurse had seen to it. Although he feared greatly, the man lifted the sheet. He dropped it quickly in place again. Well, that's how it was, she was dead, she could not wrangle with him any more. Upon the mantelpiece was a doctor's certificate.

" Pneumonia." Henry perused it and put it in

his pocket. Before leaving he surveyed the room; it was better furnished now, there were knicknacks, and Bridget had had her photograph taken recently. Comfortable it looked. At the foot of the stairs the girl met him again, and taking the candle from him blew it out with a sigh.

"Would you like some supper, sir?"

"Yes," said Henry, and she led him into the kitchen. There, while Henry ate, he listened to her account of Bridget's illness. He said at last:

"I've come to stop. We shall have to carry on, of course. What about the lodgers, are there many? You can manage, I suppose?"

"I'll try, sir. Seven," the girl said.

"Seven! Do the best you can, that's right. I'll make it worth your while," Henry declared.

There was no bedroom available for him, so he slept on a sofa in the parlour. He woke early next morning, but did not interfere with the household routine in any way. The seven young lodger girls had their breakfast in the adjoining house. But after breakfast Henry began an inspection of things; in the parlour were two other new photographs of Bridget — what a stupid craze! And there was a bureau he had not seen before. Having found the keys he opened the bureau and in a drawer he discovered two bank books, one relating

to a current account showing £120, and the other a deposit account of £600. On examining the latter he perceived that it was made up of just those sums he had sent Bridget since their separation. Lapwing's eyes grew misty and his brow moist; his hands shook and his heart seemed to rattle. She had been a wonderful, contriving woman, he acknowledged it.

Later in the morning he called at the registrar's office to record his wife's demise, visited a tailor to order a suit of mourning, and requested an undertaker to bury his dead; but so many other anxieties and the like occupied him on the day of the funeral that he quite forgot to order a wreath. However, there was a beauty subscribed for by the seven young lodgers, and a little bunch of flowers from the servant; everything was reasonable and right. When all was over his bag was taken up to the vacant bedroom, and at night he slept once again in the bed that had been Bridget's and his.

The following day he put the two bank books in his pocket and went to the bank. Lapwing explained his business to a young clerk who possessed a gentle, encouraging, aristocratic voice; the clerk took him to the manager; the manager sent him to a solicitor a few doors away; the solicitor inti-

mated to Henry that Bridget had made a will, leaving the whole of her money, property and effects to a purser in the mercantile marine who appeared occasionally to dwell in Hucknall Torkard.

Bridget's solicitor talked so rapidly: it seemed to Henry that his heart was being torn from his breast and flung to the ground; it was being flogged. Something within him gulpingly murmured "Don't!" but the only utterance that crossed his lips was: "Oh, I see."

"I must communicate with this gentleman at once," said the solicitor, a tall, lean, stern man with a harsh voice and a lot of collar. "I am the sole executor." He went on talking and talking and talking. "I hope we shall not inconvenience you, Mr. Lapwing. The law must take its course, I fear; its operations are purely automatic." His long white fingers dwelt heavily upon a glass paperweight and pressed it more firmly upon his papers. "As a human being I could wish they were more . . . er . . . more . . ."

"Adjustable?" said Henry.

"Exactly, adjustable. But as a lawyer, no; you see, no." Pulling his chair a little more closely under him, he sighed:

"Um . . . ah . . . yes . . . that's all," and Henry got up to go.

"You had better," cried the solicitor, "leave those bank books with me." Henry handed them to him.

"I'll send my clerk round to Turnbull Street this morning. You'll be there?"

"Yes," said Henry.

"Good morning, Mr. Lapwing," and he suddenly smiled so charmingly.

But the widower did not meet the solicitor's clerk; he never went back to Turnbull Street. He just hurried off to the station, took a ticket to the deuce knows where, and was never seen or heard of again. And that was hasty of him, too hasty, for if he had stayed but a few days longer he would have learned that the purser had been drowned in the sea some little time before.

CHRISTINE'S LETTER

CHRISTINE WAS VEXED. A CHARMING WAITress; she wore a wedding-ring but she was the most attractive girl at the Café Tee To Tum, always deft and alert, with beauty that cheered you, good sense that satisfied, a gentle dignity that pleased; now she was vexed, fuming. The girl at the cash desk had given her a letter, it had come by the afternoon post, a fat letter, it had been redirected once or twice, and Christine was anxious to read it. She had read snatches of it, she burned to read more, the whole of it, it was so long and beseeching, and it so gilded her triumph, because it was from her husband living in the country. Christine had not seen him for three or four months, she had not even heard from him since she had left him, this was the first letter that had reached her, and it began: *Come, it was not nice of you to run away and leave me so, but I do not reproach you.* The phrases were in the very spirit of the namby unmasterful creature she had so unhappily married, but hating him though she was, she was eager to know how much her lightning severance of their bond had wounded him. Did he want her to return, was he sorry, or angry, or what? Not that she cared now, he was in the south, she in the north, there were hundreds of miles between them.

Sick to loathing, she had run from him and put herself to work, mean work. Christine did not like working for her living, but it was heaven compared to living with *that*. She read: *I wish I had never married you, it was my mother's fault, she urged me to it.*

" Oh, it is not true; how he enrages me! Lies, lies, lies! He besieged me, swore he would kill himself with . . ."

" Some bread and butter," said the clergyman she was called to attend. " Household bread, and stale if you have got it." His voice seemed to threaten the very food he was ordering. Old, tottery, and abrupt he was, with a vague warp of rufous hairs combed from left to right across his poll that was coloured like a pineboard.

" He is a hound, you know," ruminated Christine. " As if his mother had anything to do with it! "

At the buffet she filled a pot of tea, clapped bread and butter upon a plate, knife, spoon, milk, and conveyed her tray to the clergyman.

" China tea? " he inquired, peering up. " No? I said China. I can't drink this." He was very ugly for a man of God.

" I do not reproach you. Indeed! Oh, thanks! " and with a hoity-toity aria in her soul Christine

replaced the Indian beverage with Chinese potion. " He wants me back and promises not to grumble! Jam, sir? Pastry? "

" No. I detest pastry. O . . . I don't know what else you have got; where's the card? I'd like to see it, though I shan't want anything else. Mum . . . mum . . . mum . . . bananas. I suppose there is no cream for threepence each? No. Yes, a banana." And he pushed a fold of bread and butter into his mouth without offering a grace.

Christine served him with a small plump banana on a little white dish, and for some reason pushed a cruet towards him. But people continued to pour in and she could not find a corner or a moment in which to read another line of her letter. So distracting it was, she could hardly grasp what the customers said to her, and she gazed with a lost gaze through the great window with those white letters stamped upon it:

TEA COCOA COFFEE

Flittings of experience came to and fro in her mind: conjugal life in their hamlet, so quiet, so empty, so dull, and therefore so exhausting; a husband who wanted to be a poet, whose pensive melancholy would have blackened the soul of an angel; their incompatible association, his serenity, her despair, and her suppressed fury at it all.

The tottery clergyman went, went without offering a God-bless-it, Christine was sure; a stout matron with a green parasol desired a glass of water, some cracknels and the loan of the time-table; a little fat-legged girl lolling with her toes on a table rail fell with her chair backwards and screamed.

I hate the things you think, and the things you have done to me. Well, it was his own fault; she had not loved him, she never could have loved him, for he stifled her, his very goodness mangled every fibre of her self-respect, so that, at last, to be in the same room with him submitted her to a sort of ghostly asphyxiation. They had never quarrelled, not really quarrelled, but O how often she had longed to shatter with some blasphemy the contentment of his eyes. The wild cat was in Christine, hidden, it had never been tamed, he had never known of it — how *was* he to know of it? — propriety had swamped him in such billows. And yet the place had been beautiful, ah, the hills, the woods, the sky like holy balm — if only, O if only . . .!

Christine kept stealing the letter from her breast; it began: *Beloved,* but she could not win two moments of repose, it would have to wait, it was a long, long letter, pages and pages. So Chris-

tine went on serving; there was a shower of rain outside and people lingered on. But the rain stopped at last and the people began to go, soon they were nearly all gone and then . . . Then Arabella Barnes came up with her knuckle bleeding, to beg Christine to bind it up for her, and there and then Phyllis Wicks began to beguile them with stories of her own true love. He was a bus-conductor, and had violet eyes; they made Phyllis reckless, and she lavished her pocket-money upon him.

" What's mine is his," Phyllis said to Arabella, " and what's his is mine."

" But not," Arabella sniffed, " not that boil on the back of his neck? "

" There's no such thing! His flesh is sweet as a lamb."

Faugh! Christine almost shrieked, but she only said: " Excuse me, excuse me! " and ran off to the only place where she could be free from unceasing interruptions — the lavatory. O blessed inviolable refuge! Instantly she began to read her letter.

BELOVED,

Come, it was not nice to run away and leave me so, but I will not reproach you. No, nor for anything. But still, why did you? Why did you? It is

hard for me to account for your absence, you know, I am in a false position, a stupid position. I am a fish out of water, I am like a fish that some tidal wave has left on an ironmonger's counter. People, the neighbours, your friends, the very tradesmen, imagine painful things. They must know, they can see it, they smirk and pity me. How am I to explain? It is not possible. Perhaps you have gone off with another man. Of course we had ceased to love each other, though we had only been married a year, a little long year; our life together was stifling, unbearable, though I never told you so — you would not have understood. We stung and annoyed each other — but, what of that? Excuse me, my dear, what of it?

"This then is life,
This is what has come to the surface after so many throes and convulsions."

And you have gone, have gone without a good-bye, without a quarrel, without even a kiss-my-behind, and left me only some of your old shoes and a bottle of aspirin tablets. They are no use to me. Did you think I suffer from headaches? I have never suffered from headaches. I shall throw them away soon and give the shoes to that girl with the blue eyes who brings the washing. After these

months of silence what am I to think, or do? Why have you not written? I wish I had never married you, it was my mother's fault, she urged me to it. And you were pretty, I liked that, though I did not like your irreligion, or your ideas, or the friends you favoured. They were foolish people, they were, believe me, my dear, I know, I know, all of them unworthy of you. Was I too? And yet, without boasting, I could have done great and marvellous things if you had cared for them, yes, in time I could; but you were restless, you were artistic I suppose, Bohemian, and the long slow months exhausted you. For myself I was content in the little house in this sweet country place, yet often I envied riches. O my goodness, yes; you did not guess that! I envied riches for you, so that we could have gone, well, where *could* we have gone? Now, perhaps you are gone with some man. That is not right or fitting, but if you would come home again I should not say anything about it. One forgets. It is lonely here, foolish here, but I dare not go away lest you come suddenly home again. O, I wish you would. You were always wanting to travel, to blaze out, to " do " things; even on your last birthday you said bitterly *A quarter of a century and nothing done*. What is it you want to do? You will not have children. Let us travel together. We will

give up this little house, it is too isolated and unspacious, there is not enough room in it for you and I together, it makes us melancholy and mean and full of evil. It is true, yes, though you did not believe there was any evil in me — and that used to annoy you. I'll take a mistress, I will, I swear it, and what will you say to that? O forgive me, my blessed one, I wish you would come back, it is lonely here, foolish here. Sometimes I am singing quite happily and loudly all by myself, and then in the midst of a song, without any reason at all I stop and burst into tears. Why, why is this? O tell me, dear one, come and tell. When first you left me I did not mind, I was unmoved. It was summer, and in summer what is now monotony was almost ideal. Unless you lay and stared at the sky everything you saw was green leaves and grass, grass and leaves. The birds were all those friendly fellows of one or two notes, chiff-chaffs calling for hours, the tom-tit sawing, the magpie rattling a box of peas, and the cuckoo whose company always stirred the small birds to such rages. All gone now. And at night there were nightjars, and out on the down the curlew. The boughs of the trees would just float in the hot air and the leaves would hum like gnats. Time really existed, a thick accreting medium, without lapse. Pine needles filled our

water shoot, there were cobwebs everywhere. And now the garden has run to waste, all except the bed of parsley, it *has* grown. I do not use it, but you were so fond of parsley. How it did annoy me when you sent me out at night into the dark garden to gather a sprig or two for some fish cakes or something! I would grope about and light matches endlessly in the wind until I'd picked a handful and then I would bring it to you. The grass of the lawn is getting long and rough. Do you remember one day last April when it snowed and you stripped yourself naked and went out on the lawn and danced in the white flakes? So reckless of you, anybody passing might have seen you, but I did not say anything. I did not even watch you. I got out some towels and warmed them for you, but somehow you did not like that. Why not? It always pleased you greatly to be displeased. I wish you believed in God. How can you not — there is Christ? You believed only in the things that concerned you, you said: death was death and you knew nothing about it and could not know. Oh, false dreadful trivial spirit of the age, so flippant and so fleeting; every year a new Abraham prepares to sacrifice a new Isaac. The everlasting wanders in the void, for half the truths we know can never be told, they are too divine for speech. But God is freedom

from evil — is it not so? I fear all this will bore you, I can hear you sigh. I told my mother that you were gone abroad with friends, I have not told her the truth, I dare not tell myself. Besides, it may not be true. Sometimes I have a conviction, sweet and lovely one, that it is not true, that it never can be true. Not to-day, alas, no, for it rains, it rains all over the world. There is melancholy in my mind and gloom in everything, in the straggled forlorn briars and the scopes of dark leaves shrinking from the wind on the common. I have just been walking there, along by the pond. The tiny pond shivered as the lorn drops fell upon it, some sheep lay under the blackthorn, the wind was cold. The misty hills with their dying woods were far away, too far. There was a horse tied to the white palings beside the inn, and it lifted its head and neighed as I came by. I bowed my own head and almost wept, wept for nothing save that life was gloomy and chill. And yet, a mile above those clouds that cling to the land the sunlight must be everlastingly beautiful; even in the next county the day may be bright and warm, and perhaps on some happy seacoast, blue and golden a hundred miles away, little white yachts are gliding, and people sit and snooze and declare that life is splendid. Yet here my misery fits me as tightly as a new hat that

I cannot discard, it is my clothing, my element, my doom. O you are right, my darling, this is no place for a beautiful woman. You were a bright pin stuck in a cushion of mud, it was right to go and leave me. But I might find you again and take you far away. Every time I come home my glance leaps to the hallrack to see if your hat and coat are there. No, not to-day, certainly not to-day. I do not even know whether this letter will reach you. Perhaps I shall not send it after all. I have written others, many, and I have not sent them, so you do not reply, but I go on writing and writing, and perhaps some day I will show them all to you. But no, you are harsh and evil, I hate the things you think and the things you have done to me — it is just crude cruelty. And there is hatred in me too, and evil, for I know you will never come back, never, never, never. You will find another lover who may deserve you more than I, though he could not love you better. But however that may fall, you — mark this, O mark it well, my fine lady — you will deserve him as little as you deserved me, poor thing as I am. For you had no generosity of spirit, all you had was a beautiful alluring body, nothing more on which a man could anchor his deep feeling. I suppose I could go on abusing you for a long, long page. It is sad to have to say the last

thing between us. I know I shall go on loving you. Perhaps I shall find a true friend who will love me better than you, and I shall love her — until I remember. Then I suppose I shall tell her of a lover I once had, far sweeter than she, who used me well, was beautiful beyond all, was forbearing and kind and understanding. Listening, she will vainly envy you, not, O not for your love of me, but because of your surpassing excellence!

Christine, my wife, do not believe it ever. I am a bird in your heart that will sing when you remember me.

"The hound! The hound!" gasped Christine, clenching the letter with fury. As, for a moment, she stood with it crushed between her hands her wry glance caught the one word at the beginning of the letter, *Beloved,* so she began to read it again, opening it until she came to the lines: *I wish I had not married you, it was my mother's fault, she urged me to it.* Once more she crushed the detestable pages together, and this time she cast them into the lavatory. A gesture of the hand, and they were swirled away.

"I want," called the girl in the cash desk when Christine returned, "twopence from you."

"Twopence?"

"Please. It was surcharged, that letter of yours. Didn't you notice the envelope? It had been redirected or something. I paid the postman. Twopence it was."

"O dear," Christine said. "It wasn't of the slightest consequence. I wish you hadn't. It was from . . . from some one I didn't know."

THE BOGEY MAN

LONG, LONG AGO THERE LIVED WITH HER GODmother a fair and pleasant girl named Sheila, who had queer gifts; her godmother was the best of godmothers, but had queer habits, and as they lived in a house with a peculiar chimney, all their neighbours, the maltster, the cooper, the miller, the tanner, the reeve, indeed all the important people, thought them peculiar persons. Sheila and her godmother did not mind this, because they did not know of it; and if they had known of it they would not have minded very much, because it was true.

One time, in early spring, the godmother fell sick of a quinsy, and as she lay in her bed her throat so swelled that the necklace of crystal beads she had worn for years tightened upon her and burst. She gathered up the beads and laid them beside her.

"I wish," she said to Sheila, "I had a box to put these beads in."

The girl looked high and she looked low.

"Is there no box?" urged the old woman.

"Find me a box," but there was no box there, nor the means to one, for poverty was on them.

"God bless all," the godmother sighed, "but I wish I had a box to put these beads in."

Sheila went to the wabster's to get a stone of flax, and on the window-sill of that man's house there lay a tiny black box. It was a beautiful box, black like ebony, it was exactly the kind of box to put beads in.

"Have you found a box for my beads?" the godmother asked when she returned.

"No, I have not," said Sheila.

"God bless all," sighed the old woman, "but what shall I do for my beads? I wish I had a box for my beads."

All day Sheila sat spinning the flax, but the next morning she went to the chandler's to buy some salt, and upon the chandler's counter lay a tiny black box, exactly like the one she had seen the day before. Exactly. Strange and very strange. It was just big enough to put two starlings' eggs in and no more; so beautiful that Sheila's heart and eyes and fingers were tormented, but there was no help for that. There was nothing to spare for trinketry. She took home the salt.

"A box, a box; did you find me a box?" the old godmother began again.

"No, indeed, dear godmother; but see, I will put your beads in this gallipot."

"O dear no," the godmother cried, "O dear, dear no. Fungus and rust! Is there not one little box to be had in the whole world for a sick woman who wants to live in peace?"

Day long Sheila sat spinning below while her godmother lay sighing in the room above, but the next morning she went to the miller's to buy linseed, and upon a bench outside the miller's door lay a little black box. The same, yes, the same; Sheila was sure it was that same box she had seen before in the other places. It was a miracle, it was tempting, destiny was in it, she demurred no longer, so while the miller's back was turned she snatched up the box secretly, and bore it home with the linseed.

"Yes, indeed, godmother, I have a beautiful box for you." Sheila gave the box into the old woman's hand, and said the miller had given it to her.

"Humph," said the old woman, "it is small." But she put the beads into the box and set it on a shelf beside her and straightway began to get better.

There was flax to be spun all day and every day, so Sheila spun and spun the flax. When she took

up her godmother's porridge in the morning she looked at the little shelf and saw the beads lying outside the box.

" O godmother, why do you not keep your beads in the little box I brought you? "

" What? " said the old lady.

" Your beads," Sheila said, " do you see, they are not in the box? "

The godmother stared, for there they were. " Fungus and rust! " she said, " when I am dead I don't care what becomes of my beads."

" You must keep them in the box now or they will be scattered," said Sheila. " It is a nice box." And she opened the box and restored the beads to it.

The next morning she took up the porridge as she was used to do.

" Oh," she cried, as she gave the bowl to her godmother, " but you must keep your beads in the box I brought for you."

" What? " said the old lady.

" Look, you have left them loose on the shelf again! "

" I have not touched box or beads, neither, not at all, I have not."

" They are not in the box now."

" God bless all," cried Sheila's godmother, " but

as sure as heaven is heaven I have not stretched a finger to those beads! What can it mean?"

"I will put them back," and Sheila put them back.

The next morning it was so again, the beads lay in a tiny heap outside the box. So Sheila was for secretly taking the box away from that shelf and putting it on the chimney shelf in the room below. But there it was just the same; each morning and every morning the beads lay outside the box, and Sheila knew now that the thing was bedevilled. She had stolen it, and that, though her godmother was ill a score of times over and they poor as pigeons, that was wrong to do. Godmother was getting better, but there was a shadow in the house now, a shadow that could not be seen but could be felt like a chill-cold air. It hovered just behind Sheila's shoulder and would not leave her. It was not a ghost, it was just a shadow; a shadow so vague and swift that she could never see it, not even in the candle-light. Turn as she would it was never to be seen, but she knew it was there. At times she had the feeling that it was a small shadow, and then she minded it no more than she minded a mouse; unpleasant but nothing to arouse fear or passion. There were other times when it was like a cloud larger than the world, towering

above the cottage, blotting out the light from heaven and the reason from her mind.

Sheila was a fair and honest girl, there was only one thing to be done. Without a word of all this to her godmother she conveyed the little box back to the miller's bench one day and left it secretly there. When she got home her godmother called to her.

"Sheila, Sheila, where are my beads?"

Sheila went to the chimney shelf to fetch the beads. The girl stared with trembling fear, a bee could have knocked her down — the black box was there again.

"Sheila, Sheila."

"Yes, godmother, yes," and she took up the box. It rattled with the beads, the beads were in it. She took them upstairs to fasten upon the old woman's neck, and they fitted her as well as ever they did. And very joyful Sheila was, for her godmother was almost well again. But the next morning as Sheila lit the fire she heard her voice: "Sheila! Where are my beads, Sheila?"

The girl ran up to the old woman's bed. Yes, the beads were gone. They searched in the bed and about the room but the beads were not there.

"Oh, where are my beads?" moaned the old

woman. " They were on my neck as sure as sure and I have not touched them."

Downstairs again hurried Sheila to peep in the little black box, and there were the beads lying in it. She took them and fastened them on her godmother's neck and they fitted her as well as ever they did.

Well, what was to be done about the box now? In its presence the cottage was full of fear and wickedness. Sheila could not bear it, so at noon she took the box firmly in her hand and conveyed it away, hurrying through the meadows along a green and silent path of grass until she came to a lake side. The water was still as glass until she flung the box into it; there the box rippled for a few moments before it sank among the reeds. Sheila hastened home and when she got there the chimney shelf was empty and the beads were safe upon her godmother's neck.

" I am feeling so well," said the old woman, " I shall soon get up and spin again."

Throughout the bright afternoon Sheila sat spinning, singing as easily as a bird, for the house was sweet and dear as it had ever been and there was no shadow at her shoulder and no fear in her heart. At evening who should come along but Gentle John, a youth who loved Sheila. He had

been angling, he had caught a large pike, he had brought it for her. Sheila kissed him and thanked him and he went whistling away.

"Oh, what a fish, what a beautiful fish!" exclaimed the godmother. "Baste it and broil it, Sheila. Dear child, what a fish it is!"

Sheila cut the pike open and there in its belly lay the little black box.

"Ach, beast, you little, little beast!" groaned Sheila. "O dear, this comes of my wickedness; but if water won't drown you the fire will burn you." So saying she flung the box into the fire and cooked the fish upon it, shedding many bitter tears as she did this, for the room had grown full of shadow again and her fears were all about her. Before she went to bed the box she had thrown in the fire had come out of the fire when she was not looking and lay upon the chimney shelf once more. Throughout the night Sheila could not rest, knowing there was only one thing to be done, and that was to restore the box to the miller and confess her sin. So on the morrow early she took the box with her and knocked at the mill door.

"Ah, Sheila, my child, how is your good godmother to-day?"

The miller was a vast and sturdy man whose beard was black, so black that the words he spoke

seemed to issue in blackness too. Kindly he was, though, with thick scarlet lips, and tufted eyebrows curling upwards in the shape of a bird's wing, dusty with meal. Sheila meekly held out the box to him, and he took it. His arms were bushy with black hairs, and dusty.

Said Sheila: "I stole it."

"Stole it! Oh, Sheila, oh! For why did you steal it? You know you must not steal?"

Said Sheila: "I wanted it for godmother's beads."

"Wanted it! But you know you must not. When did you take it?"

Sheila told him.

Said the miller: "But you must not steal. That will not do at all." Blacker and blacker the words sounded rolling from the bearded lips. "Whose box is this?"

"I stole it from you."

"Me! But no," said the miller, "that is not so, it is not mine."

"Yes, yes," Sheila told him.

Said the miller: "It is not, I tell you. You see, if it was mine it would belong to me, but it does not belong to me and it is not mine."

"Yes, yes," repeated the girl, "it was lying there," and she pointed to the bench beside the

door, an old bench of warped oak, but with new white legs of willow.

"It is a neat little box. Do you know what I would do with it were it mine?" said the miller, trying to open it. He could not open it and he shook it against his ear. "What is in it?"

"Nothing," said Sheila.

"O yes, there is something in it. Listen!" He shook it against Sheila's ear, and there was something in it. "Well, no; I have never seen this box afore."

"Indeed, indeed," cried Sheila. "I stole it from you. You must take it back."

Said the miller: "No, no, you must not say that. I do not like this." He crossed himself: "As God is my hap I have never seen this box before; it is not mine, take it away," and he gave it to Sheila quickly.

"Keep it, keep it," she begged.

"No, no," the miller sternly replied. "Be off! Take it away. You know you must not steal. I would not have it for the world. It does not belong to me, it is not mine, I tell you."

Sheila blushed for the shame of it: "Forgive me the stealing," said she.

"Well, I cannot say as to that. 'Tis no box of mine, and if it belongs not to me how can it be stole

from me, and how can I forgive you for stealing what is not mine? I could no more do that than I could crawl into heaven backwards. I would if I could, but you see.... Why are you crying? That is no use now."

Sheila could bear no more, so she ran away, while the miller bawled angrily after her:

"You know you must not steal, don't you, eh, don't you!"

Sheila ran into the fields and ran until she could run no more. The budding trees were bare, the grass was scanty, the earth cold, but bravely shone the sun, so she flung herself down under a squinancy tree, still clutching the mysterious box. Out upon it! What could she do with it? She could not use it, or destroy it, or restore it; she could not escape it. She had done wrong, but she wronged nobody; though the deed was bad it was done for a good sake. And now she had owned her fault — for that was the way of grace and blessedness — but it brought her to nothing but derision. Escape was vain, all peace was gone. Out upon it! What could she do?

A bright day it was, and so full of hardship. An ass grazed close by — Sheila wondered if it would eat the box for her. High up in the air two jackdaws were fighting — she wondered if they would

carry the box away for her. Something rattled within when she shook it, and the lid moved, so she put the thing down upon the grass and, kneeling before it, lifted the lid.

Curled up inside the box was a little smiling old man, no bigger than a thimble. Immediately he cocked his legs over the side of the box and stood bowing to Sheila.

" Good day to you," he said, and his voice was the sound that shrivels in the grass when the wind is gusty.

The tiny thing! Beside him was a dandelion, and the flower towered above him like a palm tree, but he was all alive in a slaty jacket and yellow breeches and shoes with crystal buckles. Long bright hair he had and a cap of green velvet; his cheeks were like apples and his beard was flowing gold.

" Oh, sir," murmured Sheila, still on her knees, " please forgive me."

" Forgive you! Oh, la, la, la! " cunningly cried the droll, and strutting like an actor. " Forgiveness is easy, is it not? O yes, it is nothing. You are a young woman full of pride — O yes! — but that is nothing. And full of penitence, and that is nothing, too. Pride is nothing, penitence nothing, forgiveness nothing, but even a bargain in farthings

must be paid to be made, and I am a plain business man. What costs nothing brings no balm, and you would not like that, you would not like that, now would you?"

"No, sir."

"Why not?" asked the droll.

"Because I stole the miller's box."

"The miller's box! Hoity, toity, nothing of the kind, the box belongs to me, it is my property, shelter, and home, it is altogether and entirely mine. I am Shiloh."

"Who, sir?" said the trembling girl.

"My name is Shiloh."

"I do not know. . . . You see, sir, I never heard that name before."

The dwarf was astonished: "What!"

"No, I have not heard of you before, sir."

"Humph," he said, with a disagreeable air, "the universe does its work very quietly. O dear, how tired I am!" And his little mouth yawned so much that he stood a-tiptoe.

"Why don't you go to sleep then, sir," remarked Sheila, thinking that if only she could get him into the box again and fasten it some way she would keep him prisoner.

"Sleep! Yes, that is what I am fit for. I have not slept for seven hundred years."

Sheila looked at him very sternly, for of course that was a lie.

" Seven hundred years." He repeated the yawn.

" I don't see how that can be," Sheila said.

" But it *is* so." The droll was easily angered. " Do not contradict. Seven hundred years awake and seven hundred years asleep; then awake, then asleep again; you understand that, don't you? You are not a fool, are you? I am quite grown up, I have lived a long while, I've been asleep six times. I knew the king of all, who lived before the Jews."

" O no, no," protested Sheila, and she could not refrain from giggling.

" Stop it, stop it! " screamed the little droll. So furious was he that he clenched the trunk of the dandelion in his two arms and wrestled with it as if it were a deadly enemy; but he could not move the dandelion, so he climbed angrily to the top of it and then slid back again with a loud whistling noise.

" What king was that you knew, sir? " Sheila gently asked when he was calmer.

" I forget," replied Shiloh.

" But you cannot forget a king," Sheila said. " You must not."

" Don't bother me, please. I was asleep a long time after."

" Yes, but you were awake a long time, too."

" That is so, that is true," Shiloh agreed. " His name was Tick . . . Tick . . . no, Tigley Plisher, I think that was it. And dozens of others . . . Snatch-rib, do you know of him? No! Important monarchs they were. Excuse me, I must forgive you, and I must pay you well. You see, I must pay well for the forgiveness I give, otherwise it is worth nothing, neither to you nor I. I will make you rich, I will coddle you in silk and beaver. You would like to be beautiful, perhaps? "

At that Sheila picked him up with her finger and thumb as you might a grasshopper, dropped him in the box again, slapped down the lid and held her white forefinger tightly upon it.

" O wicked, wicked, little man. What shall I do with him now? " thought she. She could think of nothing so she sprang up and ran away, leaving the box under the squinancy tree, but before she had gone very far she heard a strange cry like the wind rising behind her. Looking breathlessly back, all the way back to the squinancy tree, she could see nothing alarming. True, the box was gone, but nothing moved or was to be seen in that field except the ass grazing.

" Hoi! " She heard the cry again, it came from the earth below, the dwarf was standing between

her feet, carrying the box on his shoulder. "No use to run! No use to run! No use to run!" he called up at her, and sliding the box to the ground he sat upon it, kicking it with his heels in a way that made Sheila more angry than ever.

Shiloh said: "Sit down," and when she had sunk down facing him he drew up his little feet and sat cross-legged on the black box, nursing his knees.

"Listen, listen quietly, and I will tell you everything. I am Shiloh; you stole my box . . ."

"I gave it back, I do not want it, I hate it."

". . . stole my box," pursued Shiloh, rapping the box angrily with his tiny knuckles, "and you must bear the mischief of it."

Said Sheila: "Pray, sir, do forgive me."

"Of course, of course, certainly," he replied, "but listen quietly for I must tell you more, much more. As you see, I do not belong to this world; I am secret and alien in it and have no power to forgive a mortal until a compact has been made between us."

Sheila's tears began to fall: "Oh, sir, what must I do?"

Said Shiloh: "Listen quietly and you will understand. I must offer, and you must take, a rich gift; that is the one sign and condition of our bond. You may choose what gift you will. Then I shall belong

to you, and when I belong to you I am bound to do your lightest wish or your mightiest bidding. First of all you would command me to forgive you, and I would do so gladly, that all should be well between us."

But Sheila was not such a ninny as the little demon supposed, and although she feared that she was now miserably netted in a mysterious and disturbing adventure she sharply and firmly said "No" to the droll.

"What!" Shiloh passionately cried. "Listen, is it that fool Gentle John? I warn you, if he wins your love from me I shall be furious. Now, now, what must I give you, Sheila? Say, and I am your immortal friend." Silently he waited, then yawned: "Oh, how tired I am!"

"Go to sleep then," shouted Sheila indignantly, and springing to her feet once more she ran to her home.

"Godmother, how are you to-day, godmother?"

"I am not well, my child, I am not well; I fear my end is come," and the old woman plucked off her nightcap and dashed it upon the floor. Sheila gave her a cupful of the same warm broth, made of apes' bones and caterpillars' blood, which had cured the saddler's apprentice of the rake's rash,

and soon godmother sank into a sweet sleep. Sheila then went down to spin, and she spun very pensively for the rest of the day. Towards evening Shiloh suddenly appeared upon the arm of her spinning wheel, and bowed his deep bow.

"I am Shiloh," he began again, "whose box you stole."

"You know I restored it to you," Sheila said very earnestly.

"Why, I declare," — Shiloh grinned cunningly — "it is still upon your chimney-shelf!"

And so it was. Sheila snatched it up and placed it before the imp.

"Take it away. We do not want it here."

"Very well," said Shiloh. "Poof!" he said, and gave the box a tap with his tiny finger. "Poof!" and the box was gone. "But I do not forgive you, Sheila, as yet. O no. But tell me," he went on pleasantly, "what gift you have chosen?"

"None, nothing at all." Sheila was firm about it. "I would not accept a grain of earth. You are not what you pretend to be, and I fear you will do nothing but evil."

"And you, you are all you pretend to be, virtuous and good," sneered Shiloh, "and I fear you stole a box from me."

Sheila stayed silent.

"You wrong me indeed and deeply," he continued sadly, "you who could befriend me for ever. When I was born I was no bigger than I am now, but I grew and grew until I became as tall as a tree." Shiloh stood tilted upon his toes, with his arms outspread as if he would touch the sky. "After that I began to grow small again, small and smaller until I am but the wafer you see me. Now I must sleep for seven hundred years and renew my life, but unless I am bidden to sleep by a mortal, I shall live on and decline and dwindle until I am nothing. But the cosmos is agreeable and eternity is kind, and you can aid me, here you can acquit yourself, here you may even serve mankind, for were I the very soul of evil yet I must become your slave if you take my gift. You may bid me to sleep and I must sleep seven centuries through and there would be no evil in the world."

Shiloh had sunk down into a despondent posture, his voice was wavering and low.

"But why, why must I first take a gift from you?" asked Sheila.

The droll looked eager once more. "I serve a master who is helpless without mortal aid, whose being is but cloud and fantasy, his voice but the roar of the wind in a cobweb, his light the moon in a moth's eye. But with mortal aid he can o'er-

leap eternity. The reward he gives could never be earned by human kind — what earthly merit could possibly deserve everlasting bliss? Yet I offer a tangible gift, and your belief obtains it, in proof of my master's greatness. I will give you a chamber pot made all of gold. It was once Cleopatra's. Grand and glistening it is; it rings like a marriage bell and rolls like thunder."

Said Sheila gravely: "There is only one truth, the truth of heaven."

"Oh, the truth!" yawned Shiloh, "ah, is it here, or there, or anywhere?"

"I would not take a grain of earth from you," repeated Sheila.

"Then I shall never forgive you," Shiloh threatened, "and you must bear the mischief for ever. Oh, la, la, la," he sighed, "once you were a beautiful maid, you have become ugly already."

Sheila did not answer him, she just tossed her head and smiled and thought: if it came to that he was not very handsome himself.

"Ho, ho, yes," continued Shiloh, chafing his hands that were like the paws of mice, "ugly you are, and ugly you shall remain."

And still Sheila smiled, knowing it was all untrue. Shiloh was deeply offended, for nothing angered him one half as much as Sheila's doubts

of him. It is very true, alas, that in all our purposes, fickle, faithful, malicious, or merely wayward, we desire undeviating faith, though it may yield us nothing but arguments for private mockery. The tiny man leaped like a flea in one mad raging jump from the spinning wheel to the table that stood against the wall by the window. He stumbled in a cleft of the table, but picked himself up and began to run. Right across the table he fled, his tiny legs going fast on the trot like the spokes in a wheel, until at last he reached the wall. There he took a piece of chalk from his pocket and after turning to be sure that Sheila was watching, he began to draw upon the wall a picture of a snail. Quickly he drew a snail with horns and its shell upon its back, and when the picture was done he tickled the snail with his fingers, whispered words to it, and thereupon the snail came alive and began to move upon the wall. Sheila saw it. And Shiloh seized the two bold horns and straddled himself across the slow snail's glistening shoulders. "Kep! Kep!" he cried, guiding the snail in a circle upon the wall, and while it travelled so Shiloh leaned with his chalk and drew a white ring as large as a dish. *Needs must when the devil drives,* and Sheila saw that a snail can be very rapid at times and she thought it odd until Shiloh explained that every

snail in its eager youth is swift as the thunderstone, is really congealed lightning, and that it goes slowly only to prevent itself leaping distractedly over the corners of the world. "Of course they soon grow out of that," said Shiloh, yawning, "they are not young for long." Meanwhile the snail roved back and forth across the interior space of the ring and wherever it went Shiloh whitened with his chalk, until in the end there was a round white disc left upon the wall, glistening with the shine the snail had smeared in its track. Then Shiloh jumped down upon the table, puffing and blowing and brushing little clouds of chalk from his jacket.

"Look now!" he cried. Sheila could see into the disc as if it were a looking-glass, and oh, she had changed indeed, she was ugly as death itself, her own likeness frightened her. The dwarf had vanished. Nothing was left of the snail but a small clot on the table that looked like melting honey. Sheila rubbed and scratched at the white disc until her fingers bled, but it was fixed.

Well, she was now more than ever determined not to accept a gift from the tiny thing, he was a demon seeking to enslave her to some purpose that could only be evil.

Day after day Shiloh came and pestered her and

she could not dismiss him. Where he lived or wandered was unknown to her, but that he never slept was clear, for he was always yawning.

In he came. "Good morning, Sheila. Is your godmother so well?"

And Sheila sighed, "No, she is sick, and sick again, and the chill-cold days break her spirit. Poor godmother!"

"Ahum! She would laugh at fine sunny weather. Shall I send a rare hot midsummer day? I can do that, you know."

"No," said Sheila, "she does not care for hot days, she might catch a sunstroke."

"A windy day?" he suggested, "she wants bracing air. Shall I send a gale? I can do that, you know."

"No," said Sheila, "it might blow the house down."

"Tut! A fall of snow, then? That is often beautiful."

"No," said Sheila. "She might die of freezing."

"Aren't you the little twisting-bee!" he cried in anger. "I am Shiloh, whose box you stole. Your godmother's sickness lies in your own keeping, you can heal her in a moment. Make me your slave, and I must do your will."

"You can do this," Sheila said, "without my taking a gift from you; you are wise and skilled. O do it, sir, and I will bless your name for ever."

"Pooh, what is the good of that?" said he. "No, I serve a master, the King of Kings, but we are emptiness itself without your mortal alloy. Do as I bid and I will serve you like a queen. And if you fear me you have only to put me to sleep and I shall sleep for seven hundred years."

"No," said the tempted girl slowly, "not even for godmother can I do this; you are full of evil. Lies, lies! Why do you lie so?"

"Oh," Shiloh said, "because I am weary, and dissimulation is stimulation."

"I don't understand that."

"Well, it *is* so." He yawned and yawned. "Besides, I am the Other Side of things. All you think good may be bad, all you think bad may be good."

"And I don't understand *that*."

Shiloh replied: "Strong meat for men and lily buds for maids; did Ajax feed on apples?"

"I beg your pardon, sir?" said Sheila.

Again Shiloh yawned. Then quietly and most beautifully a bell tinkled one sweet golden note in the room, an echo of enchantment fluting a brief air, a star of sound fallen from a cloud into a

cloud. It seemed to have come from the white disc on the wall.

"Go look," said Shiloh, pointing towards the disc, and Sheila looked there and saw herself again pure and fair, beautiful as before. Said the droll: "There, I give you that looking-glass, it is yours."

"No, no, no," whispered Sheila, but as she spoke her image in the glass changed again into a rude and wretched thing, and Shiloh was gone.

From day to day now Sheila's maddening plight increased. Had she not owned the theft? Had she not given back the box? Yet she was not free, not free; far from free and shackled from top to toe. Godmother's illness, too, was due to her wickedness, and now even her recovery lay in the peril of her young soul. Her ugliness had become a fact, it was not a mere jest of the looking-glass; the neighbours' children mocked her, and Gentle John came no more but followed after other young maids of the village. Beauty would come back to her — so would Gentle John — if she took the imp's gift, but that would plunge her into everlasting woe. A terrible thing godmother's quinsy had been since it burst that necklace and the beads must have a box and Sheila is tempted and the devil gets loose on the world again! He had been chained for

years and years, as everybody knew, chained in a bottomless pit, but here he was again — it was surely him. It was on a rainy March eve he came next, the wind blew loud in the forest, and the dry limbs were falling down. Between his yawns he began to talk of his master.

"Who is your master?" asked Sheila. "Do you mean that Tigley man?"

"No," the imp cried, "no, O no, not at all. My master is the king of all."

"King! King of all! Why, what does he do?" exclaimed Sheila. For a space the droll answered not a word. Then he began: "Listen, listen quietly, I will tell you. He . . ." Shiloh paused, then held one hand to his lips in cautious utterance; his eyes glanced sidelong, uneasily. "He can ask all the questions no one is clever enough to answer, and he can answer all the questions no one is clever enough to ask."

Sheila said dubiously: "What questions?"

Said Shiloh: "It is no use to tell you . . . besides . . ."

"What are the answers then?"

"There are no answers to such questions."

"Then why does he ask them?"

"Because they cannot be answered, of course."

"Nonsense." Sheila was annoyed. "I do not

believe you. No questions, no answers — pooh! There is no such person at all."

"Hush, hush, Sheila; I could show you my master. Hush. I could show you, terrible and gigantic beyond belief. I could, I could."

Then said Sheila: "Show me."

The little thing shuddered as he sat cross-legged. "No. But yes, I will, I will show you, I will show you. Hush. Take the rushlight in your hand and hold the flame of it level with this table."

So Sheila took the rushlight and did that.

"Hush," said Shiloh again, "I will show you"; and he rose and tiptoed solemnly close up to the flame, so that his shadow was thrown large upon the wall, his funny hat, his beard and hair, his jacket and breeches and shoes, as large as a little boy.

"There," he whispered. "Do you not see?"

"Ha, ha!" laughed Sheila. "Why, Shiloh, that is yourself, it is your own shadow."

"Hush," said he, "hush! Be silent! It is the king of all, king of everlasting bliss and everlasting horror. Yes, it is so."

But Sheila could not contain her scorn. "That is not a king at all, you deceive me again and again; it is yourself, your own shadow. Look now!" She took the rushlight and hid the flame beneath the

table. The life almost bubbled from her heart. Light was hidden, but the shadow of the imp remained upon the wall. Slowly it turned and walked along the wall, and as it moved there was a glow under its feet as if they trod upon fire. Just as it was fading from her sight Sheila saw the head of the shadow lifted in a deep yawn.

It was long before her fears were calmed, for a wild storm warred without, and there was a wild doom within whirling around her trembling soul. She sought frenziedly for the tiny imp, but he was gone; if he had appeared then Sheila would surely have crushed him under her foot as a beetle is crushed — perhaps that would free her. But the dark mood passed with the darkness, and when day dawned crisp and clear Sheila had forgotten her anger and thought of Shiloh with only pitying kindness.

Later as she sat near the window eating porridge Shiloh suddenly peered over the rim of her dish. "Hullo!" He drew himself up by his two arms to sit on the edge of the dish, and dangling his legs he watched Sheila consume each spoonful.

"Take care, or you will slide into my porridge," Sheila said, "and I could easily eat you." He only laughed and combed his beard with his fingers.

" I will show you something. Open the window, Sheila, and I will show you."

So Sheila opened the window. It was a bright and tuneful morning, the spring birds sang joyously and the sky was bundled up with glittering cloud. A hazel tree grew outside the window, and on every twig a catkin hung, all gold, and on the end of every catkin a single drop of the night's rain hung, all crystal, except that a drop here and there was coloured as if made of the dew of rainbows and the light of streams.

" Lift me up into that tree, Sheila." Sheila held down her hand and when Shiloh had clambered upon one of her fingers she carefully put him out upon a thin branch of the nut tree. Then he swung himself along the branches, as gay as a tom-tit, reaching after the long thick catkins one at a time and hugging them to his breast while he put his hand carefully down to catch the rain-drop in his palm. It filled his palm and he rolled it so for a space as a boy rolls a ball; then he threw it in at the window to Sheila, and it would fall upon the table sharp and brittle, rolling like a bead and glittering like a gem. Most were white, but he gathered some of green and blue and yellow and red.

" Help me down, Sheila." She helped him down

and stood him on the table among the solid drops; they were so large to him that he walked among them as a shepherd among his sheep. Said Shiloh: "These would make fine beads; what pretty beads they would make to be sure!" Then Sheila saw that each rain-drop had a thread hole in it.

"I will make a thread for them," he cried. "Bend down." He snatched two or three strands of hair from Sheila's golden head, and trudged along the table with the hairs dangling across his shoulder. Then he laid them down beside the beads. Very big and fine they were, and he twisted and rolled the hairs between his hands until a single shining thread was made.

"Beautiful beads!"

"Yes, indeed," Sheila said gaily as she watched him.

"Beautiful beads, beautiful beads!" he kept on saying as he threaded them swiftly upon the glistening hair. They were all threaded.

"I wonder if they will fit you?"

Shiloh began then to haul at one end of the rope of beads: "Come up, come up!" like a man hauling a boat upon a beach; the beads themselves rattled along the board with the sound of moving shingle. Sheila bent her head once more to the

table and looped the beads around her neck, but Shiloh still kept one end of them in his hand.

"Give me the other end," said he, and Sheila did so. They fitted closely around her soft neck. "Ah . . . !" sighed the little imp. Sheila stood up, but he clung to the ends of the necklace and hung at her throat like a locket. His left hand held one end of the beads and his right hand the other.

"That will do," said Sheila, bending down for him to step upon the table.

"That will do," she said again, for he did not release his hold.

"Do you hear me!" She shook the necklace, but Shiloh did not hear, he did not let go; his little fists were wound tightly into the ends of the coil, and he was fast asleep, at last asleep, for ever on Sheila's neck. His silence frightened the girl and she tried to snatch the tiny man from his clasp on the necklace, but to her horror she found he was no longer warm and living, he was hard and cold; he had, indeed, all on the moment of sleep turned into gold. She tried to slip the necklace over her head but it was not loose enough. In a frenzy she tore at the beads and tried to snatch them apart, but the coil of hair was so strongly woven that it neither broke nor gave, and the knife could not cut it. She had been trapped, the demon had given her

his gift and oh, she was lost for ever. Sly, remorseless devil; this was the sleep he had desired.

"Choong!" went the sweet one bell-note that seemed to pour from the looking-glass. Sheila was startled from her struggle to break the necklace. She stared like an image, then the sudden quiet swirled and stung her, and she crept to the looking-glass and peered. Once again she was beautiful as of old. She was more beautiful, it was sweet comfort to see, and she stared so long at the fine reflection that her fears began to leave her. What was done could not be undone. It was beyond her strength. It was not by her will. She had been tricked. Turning from the lovely glass she saw upon the chimney shelf again the little black box that had been her downfall. Perhaps . . . perhaps the real, the living Shiloh, was hiding in it? Sheila opened the box. It was full of golden guineas. And there was her godmother descending the stairs: "I am quite well again, Sheila, I am as well as ever I was!"

All this was long, long ago, but Sheila lives and blooms like a never-fading flower; she does not grow old or unhappy, and she believes that she will live for seven hundred years. And what will happen then? Ah well, there is time enough for grief, for though her godmother died in the ex-

treme of age the tiny black box is always full of guineas, and Sheila is the loveliest of women. But she does not wed. Why is this? And why, when she goes to a ball, does she always hang a silver penny over the figure of Shiloh sleeping on her neck. That is neither here nor there. All the wedded men of the world, when they see her wish they had not married or been taken in marriage, and all the unwedded ones declare that they will never marry or be taken in marriage but by her alone. And they vow fond eternal fealties to Sheila.

THE OLD VENERABLE

DOWN IN THE VILLAGE THE WOMEN CALLED him "the dirty old man," the children did not seem to notice him, and their fathers called him "the owd venrable," or old Dick, with a sigh as of vague envy. There was little cause for that, he living in a wood in a little old tent shanty built of boughs and string and tarpaulin, with a heap of straw to sleep in. Outside the tent was his fire, and he had dwelt there so long that the mound of wood ash had grown almost as big as his house. Seventy years old he was, an old venerable ragged crippled man using two sticks, with a cheery voice and a truculent spirit, but honest as spring water, sharing his last drop with the last man or the first — he invariably shared theirs. When he was drunk he sang, when he was not drunk he talked for evermore about nothing, to nobody, for his tent was in a wood, a little clearing in a great wood, and the wood was away, a long way, from anywhere, so that he lived, as you might say, on air and affability and primed his starved heart with hope. A man like that could hope for anything, and a mere anything — twopence — would bring him bliss, but his undeviating aspiration, an ambition as passionate as it was supine, was to possess a donkey. He

had pestered many sympathetic people who had the means; often he had sent out that dove of his fancy from the ark of his need, but it had never returned, at least not with a donkey; and never an ass fell like a bolt from heaven. If it had done, it would surely have taken no hurt, such a grand wood it was, miles of it, growing up and down the hills and hills, and so thickly bosomed that if you had fallen from a balloon into the top of that wood it would have been at the last like sinking into a feather bed. And full of birds and game. And gamekeepers. The keepers did not like him to be there, it was unnatural to them, but keepers come and go, the shooting was let to a syndicate, and he had been there so long that new keepers found him where the old ones had left him. They even made use of him; he swept the rides and alley-ways for the shooters, marked down the nests of pheasants, and kept observation on rabbits and weasels and the flocks of pigeons which anybody was welcome to shoot. Sometimes he earned a few shillings by plashing hedgerows or hoeing a field of roots, but mostly he was a "kindler," he gathered firewood and peddled it on a hand-truck around the villages. That was why he dreamed of donkey and nothing but donkey; a creature whose four feet together were not so big as one of its ears would carry

double and treble the load of kindling and make him a rich man.

One day he tramped right over to the head keeper's house to deliver a message, and there Tom Hussey had shown him a litter of retriever puppies he was tending. They had a pedigree, Tom Hussey said, as long as the shafts of a cart; the mother herself was valued at fifty golden guineas, but the sire belonged to Lord Camovers and bank-notes wouldn't buy that dog, not love nor money — not even the crown of England. There they were, six puppies just weaned and scrambling about, beautiful bouncing creatures, all except one that seemed quiet and backward.

"That one?" Tom Hussey said; "I be going to kill her. Sha's got a sort of rupture in her navel."

"Don't do that," said old Dick, for he knew a lot about dogs, as well as birds and lambs and donkeys; "give it to I." And Tom Hussey gave him the pup then and there and he took it home to his tent and bandaged it artfully with a yard strip of canvas, and called it Sossy because it was so pert.

Every day the old man attended to that bandage round Sossy's stomach — he knew a whole lot about dogs — and the dog throve and grew, and

every night nuzzled in the straw beside him; and Dick rejoiced. They lived heartily, for Dick was a nimble hand with a wire, rabbits were plentiful, and he was always begging for bones and such-like for his Sossy. Everywhere in that wood he took Sossy with him and he trained her so in the arts of obedience that she knew what he wanted even if he only winked one eye. After about six months of this he took off her bandage for the last time and threw it away. There she was, cured and fit and perfect, a fine sweet flourishing thing. What a glossy coat! What a bushy tail! And her eyes — they made you dream of things!

A while after that Tom Hussey came into the wood to shoot some pigeons. There was always a great flock of them somewhere in the wood and when they rose up from the trees the whirr of their thousand wings was like the roar of a great wave. Well, Tom Hussey came, and as he passed near the tent he called out the good of the morning to old Dick.

"Come here," cried Dick, and Tom Hussey went, and when he saw that dog you could have split him with a lath of wood he was so astonished. Sossy danced around him in a rare flurry, nuzzling at his pockets.

"She's hungry," he said.

"No, she ain't. Get down you great devil! No, she ain't hungry, she's just had a saucepan full o' shackles — get down! — that saucepan there what I washes myself in."

When Tom Hussey shot a pigeon she stood to the gun and brought the bird back like an angel.

"Dick, you can swap that dog for a donkey whenever you've a mind to," Tom Hussey said.

"An't she got a mouth? I tell you," Dick cried joyfully.

"Like silk," was the rejoinder.

"It's a gift."

"Born," chanted Tom Hussey.

"It's a gift, I tell you."

"Born. She's worth twenty pounds. You sell that bitch and get you a donkey, quick."

"No," deliberated the veteran. "I shan't do that."

"Twenty pound she's worth, of good money."

"I shan't have 'ee, I tell you."

"You sell that bitch and get you a donkey. That's my last word to you," Tom Hussey said as he stalked away.

But that "owd venrable" was a far-seeing sagacious creature, a very artful old man he was, and when the time came for it he and Tom Hussey conjured up a deal between themselves. It would have

been risky for Tom Hussey, but as he was changing to another estate he chanced it and he connived and Sossy was mated on the sly to one of his master's finest retrievers, as good as ever stepped into a covert, and by all accounts the equal of Lord Camovers' dog that had begot Sossy. So when Tom Hussey departed there was old Dick with his valuable dog, looking forward to the few weeks hence when Sossy would have the finest bred puppies of their kind in the land. He scarcely dared to compute their value, but it would surely be enough to relegate the idea of a donkey to the limbo of outworn and mean conceits. No, if all went well he would have a change of life altogether. He would give up this old tent; it was rotting, he was tired of it. If things came wonderful well he would buy a nag and a little cart and a few cokernuts, and he would travel the round of the fairs and see something of the world again. Nothing like cokernuts for a profitable trade. And perhaps he might even find some old " gal " to go with him.

This roseate dream so tinted every moment of his thoughts that he lived, as you might say, like a poet, cherishing the dog, the source and promise of these ideals, with fondness and joy. The only cloud on this horizon of bliss was the new gamekeeper, a sprag young fellow, who had taken a

deep dislike to him. Old Dick soon became aware of this animosity for the new keeper kept a strict watch upon his neighbourhood and walked about kicking over Dick's snares, impounding his wires, and complaining of his dirty habits and his poaching. And it was true, he *was* dirty, he had lost his pride; and he *did* poach, just a little, for he had a belly that hungered like any other man's, and he had a dog.

Early one morn as Dick was tending his fire the new keeper strolled up. He was a wry-mouthed, slow-speaking young chap, and he lounged there with his gun under his arm and his hands in his pockets. Neither spoke for a while, but at last the keeper said:

"It burns well."

"Huh, and so would you burn well," grinned the old man, "if I cut you atop of it."

For fully two minutes the young keeper made no retort, he was a rather enraging young keeper. Then he said: "Ah, and what do you think you may be doing round here?"

The old man flung a few pinches of tea into a can of boiling water.

"You get on with your job, young feller, and I'll get on with mine."

"What *is* your job?"

The " owd venrable " eyed him angrily:

" My job? I'll tell you — it's to mind my own business. You'll learn that for yourself later on, I 'spects, when you got the milk outer your mouth — you ought to, however. Wait till yer be as old as I."

" Ah," drawled the keeper, " I don't mind waiting."

" I met chaps like you before," the old man began to thunder, " thousands on 'em. D'you know what happened to the last one? "

" Died of fleabites, I shouldn't wonder," was the placid rejoinder.

" I had him on the hop. When he warn't thinking," the old man ruminating grinned, " I wuz! I give him a kick o' the stomach as fetched him atween wind and water, and down he went, clean as a smelt. D'you know what I did then? "

" Picked his pocket, I shouldn't wonder."

" Yah! Never stole nothing from no man, 'cept it was my own. Clean as a smelt, I tell you."

" Well," the new keeper slowly said, shifting his gun from the left arm to the right, " I can take a hiding from any man. . . ."

" Ah, and from any old woman, too, I should say."

". . . from any man," continued the imperturb-

able one, " as can give it me — if you knows of one." He began to pick his teeth with a match-stick. " Did you get my message? " he more briskly added.

" What message? "

" I sent you a message."

" Then you sent it by a wet hen. I an't had no message."

" I know you had it, but I'll tell you again. I've got orders to clear you out of this wood, you and your dog. You can take your time, don't want to be hard on you, but out you goes, and soon, you and your dog."

" Well, we can go, my cunning feller, we can go."

" That's right, then."

" We can go — when we've a mind to. But who's a-going to look arter my job? "

" What job's that? "

" Huh, what job! " the old man disgustedly groaned. " Why, who's a-going to keep an eye on things, and they poachers, thousands on 'em, just waiting for to catch I asleep! But they can't do it! "

" Naw, I shouldn't think anyone *could* sleep in a hole like that! "

" Yah, I could sleep, I could sleep a sack o'

taters rotten! And who's a-going to clear up when the storms been shamracking about the place? I cleans up the paths, I cleans 'em for one and all, and I cleans 'em for you. Some I does it right for and some I does it wrong. If I did it right for all I'd be out of this world, seemly."

"Who asked you to? Nobody asked you to, we can do without it, and we can do without you. So now I've told you." With that the young keeper sauntered airily away.

"Yah!" the old venerable called after him. "Clean as a smelt, I tell you, clean as a smelt"; and as long as his adversary remained in view he continued to remind him of that excellent conclusion.

But despite his contempt the old man was perturbed, he knew the game was up, he would have to seek a lodging elsewhere. By the grace of fortune the blow had come just when it could least concern him; all he wanted was time for Sossy to rear her pups, and then he would go; then he would go gaily, driving his horse and cart like a man of property all over that Berkshire and that Oxfordshire, along with some old "gal."

A week later Sossy was safely delivered of nine puppies. Miracles are possible — they must be — but it is not possible to anticipate a miracle: a litter

of nine! They were born in the tent beside the man, and they all, Dick, Sossy and the nine morsels, slept together, and in a few days although Sossy, despite heroic feeding, began to grow lean, the pups were fat as slugs.

When they were seven days old the man got up one morning to go to a job of hedging. It was a bright, draughty March morn, and he noted the look of the early pink clouds. A fine day promised, though some of the clouds had a queer shape, like a goose with its head turned backwards. That boded something! The blackies and thrushers sang beautiful. After Sossy had fed somewhat daintily from the same pot of "shackles" as himself, old Dick hung the sack over the tent opening and left her mothering the pups. He limped off to work. The hedge he was laying was on an upland farm that overlooked his wood. At midday when he lunched he could sit and stare over the vast stern brownness that was so soon to unbend in unbelievable trellises of leaves. Already the clearings and banks were freckled with primroses, the nut thickets hung with showers of yellow pods, and the pilewort's cresset in the hedge was a beam to wandering bees. In all that vastitude there was one tiny hole into which he had crept like a snail for years and years, but it was too small to hide him for

ever and ever. So now they would go, he and Sossy, driving about the land, he and Sossy and . . . and some old gal. Just beside him was a pond and the barns of the farm. Two white horses were nuzzling each other in the croft, and a magpie watched them from the cone of a stack. A red ox at the pond snuffled in the water, and as it lifted its head to stare at the old man streams of water pattered back from its hairy lips. Deftly the ox licked with its tongue first one nostril, then the other, but water still dribbled from its mouth in one long glutinous stripe. A large cloud hung above the scene, brooding, white and silent as a swan. Old Dick rose and stretched himself; the wind had died. When the afternoon had worn on he ceased work and turned home. Half-way through the woods he came to a clearing full of primroses, and on a bank, with her muzzle in a rich clump of the blooms, lay his dog, shot through the breast. The old man knelt down beside his dog but there was nothing he could do, she had been dead a long time. He recalled hearing the shot of a gun, hours ago, not a sharp report, but sullen. Perhaps she had gone out for a scamper and had been chasing a rabbit, or perhaps she had left her litter in order to come to him. The keeper had shot her, shot a poor man's dog, shot her dead. There was nothing

he could do, the doom had come crushing even time in its swiftness.

" Fizzled and mizzled I am now," he said forlornly, " and that's a fact."

He left her there and conversing angrily pottered home to his tent. Two of the pups were already dead. The others were helpless, and he was helpless, there was nothing he could do for them, they were too young to feed by hand, and he had nothing to feed them with. He crawled out of the tent to suck a long drink from the bucket of water that stood outside, and then he knelt there gazing without vision at the smouldering fire.

" I know, yes I know what I can do," he mumbled, picking up his long, heavy billhook.

" Just a smack o' that behind his earhole and he won't take no more hidings from e'er a man or a woman neither. Tippit, I says, and he'd be done, he'd be done in a couple o' minutes; ah, quicker, quicker'n you could say smoke." He dashed the billhook to the earth and groaned. " Oh, I be fair fizzled and mizzled now, I be, ah." He sat up and pulled the bucket between his legs. Picking up one of the pups he plopped it into the bucket. " There's your donkey," he gurgled, " huh, huh, huh! And there " — as he plopped the others in one by one — " goes your cob and your cart and your cokernuts.

And there " — as he dashed the last one violently in — " goes the old gal. Huh ! "

After a while the old man rose and emptied the drowned bodies into a heap of bushes; the clash of the bucket as he flung it back only fretted the silence of the wood for a few moments.

JUDITH

I

THIS IS THE STORY OF A GREAT LADY WHO DID a great wrong to a mere man, a man so nearly insignificant and uncouth as to be almost unworthy of the honour. He was — may Heaven determine his rewards — a village schoolmaster; she the great dame of their part of the Suffolk county, and her name was Judith. Of high but untitled birth she had been married young to a baronet of greater age, whose family distinction was as high, and whose life was devoted to the timely destruction of ferocious things in field and flood and air, by gun or hound or angle. Master of hounds and owner of choice coverts he was a Nimrod; when birds were coming freely over his loader had more than once seen — left, right: left, right — the four birds falling in the air at the one time. Often! Duffy Dallow tell you the same. Sir Gulistan Leeward was a tall thin man with a seared and apparently vexed face; though his chest was not broad his lungs were powerful, for he spent a great part of each hunting day around the coppices yodelling a piercing tenor cry, Barley! Barley! Barley! Barley! in a voice whose demoniacal lustre must have added a mile a minute to the

pace of absconding foxes. "Flew wind him in there!" he would cry with passion, "flew wind him, my beauties!" and if some silly Cressid or Rampart ambled from the thicket to wag a tail at him the thong of his whip would crack at their misguided behinds.

For ten years Judith shared in his sport and enjoyed his company "reverently, discreetly, advisedly and soberly, duly considering the causes for which Matrimony was ordained," but by the time she was thirty there was an ache in her bosom — she had no child. Sir Gulistan Leeward may have regretted this, but whether the omission was hers (as he had no doubt), or the lapse his (as Judith believed) he was not profoundly concerned, and being by this time fifty years old he declared that his burning desire to shoot hippopotami — and possibly anthropophagi — in the swamps of Africa must be immediately realized, or for ever relinquished, heaven itself being no place for hippo. Judith did not accompany him upon the happy business, and it was during his twelve-month's absence that this little episode of the schoolmaster occurred.

Early one hunting morn, a crisp morn full of hoar-frost and slanting sunlight that laid shadows of trees half-way across fields, the bay she was

riding had refused a hedge that everything else took easily, and she was left alone. Judith coaxed and scolded and clouted her timid gelding, but he was feckless — perhaps he was not properly awake. Blast the wretch! they had only just cast off. The lady realized soon that she was entirely alone, the hunt had swept on, there was not a sight or sound of it; she was inimitably, almost terribly alone. So they went at it again, but the devil took the hedge so timorously that he only landed halfway across it and stuck there like a fool with his forelegs on one side and his hind legs on the other, while Judith had flown haplessly over his head into a lane. She dropped on some boggy turf, still clutching the bridle, but she had wrenched her stirrup foot. Very ruffled and shaken she adjusted her hat and then sat huddled up, clutching her knee, although it was her foot that tortured her. The horse soon wriggled himself free from the hedge and stood before her, snuffing the rank herbage, until Judith terribly told him the unmentionable truth about his behaviour. He tossed his head, champed, and briskly flourished his cropped tail. The lady pulled herself up by the bridle and stood on her sound foot, but as soon as she began to hop towards the saddle the beast sidled away from her.

"Ach, cantankerous offal!" she groaned.

Then, startled by her strange approaches, the bay wrenched itself away from her altogether and galloped down the lane.

A little way off it passed a cottage with a smoking chimney, standing back a little from the road, and Judith saw a man run out from the cottage and stare after the flying horse. Then the man turned and looked in Judith's direction. She had sunk down on the grass again. She waved her crop at him. The man stared doubtfully for a while, with one hand upon his hip, but when Judith gave a faint shout he ran down the road towards her. He was only half-dressed, in grey trousers and white shirt, he had no coat or waistcoat on, there was a brown belt round his waist. He did not run strenuously or excitedly, but with a long casual lope that brought him quickly.

"What's the matter?"

He was tall and lean, fair and shaven, with mild eyes and a blunt nose; perhaps thirty years old; his face had a country tan. Judith could not quite tell if he were a gentleman, but he was very friendly and sympathetic.

"My horse threw me, I've hurt my foot, I can only stand on one leg. . . ."

"Like a heron," he grinned.

Certainly no gentleman. "You can't walk then?" he asked.

"No. I want you to send for my car."

He stared down at her, she up at him. The man apparently did not know her!

"I'm Lady Leeward," she said, a shade too casually perhaps.

"Leeward? O . . . from the Park! Dear . . . that's two miles away. You'd better come along to my cottage."

"But I can't walk, you see," explained the lady. "If you'll send to the Park and tell them to bring the car. . . ."

"I've no one to send."

"Haven't you a bicycle?"

"No, I think bicycles are such. . . ."

"If you aren't gone too long I can stop here. Would it be putting you to . . ." Her head began to sag and her mind to grow hazy, ". . . if you aren't gone long."

"I think I'd better not leave you," interrupted the man, quickly bending. "Not like this. I can see you are sweating with pain. I must carry you, it's just along there, two minutes, you can see it. Let me help you to get up."

"I wish you wouldn't," she muttered pettishly, but somehow she was tilted up on to her sound

foot. Then she swooned away and was remotely aware that he was carrying her huddled across his shoulders, like a sick sheep, for hours and hours. When she revived she could hear a loud steady noise — boom, boom, boom — and she was lying on a couch in his cottage. The man was sitting beside her, his left arm was around her, her head was against his breast, and she was sipping from a cup of water in his right hand. She did not want to move, she was aware of a fine log fire on the open hearth, and a kettle boiling. There was her hunting hat lying upside down under the table. Boom, boom, boom. The door was open, she could see the sunlight blazing on the asters in the garden. It was blazing, too, diagonally across the white cloth on the table, on the teapot and mug and jug and loaf and plate of red apples. Such yellow butter, too! Boom, boom . . . why, yes, that was his heart beating.

"How did I get here?" she murmured, and stirred; she took the cup from him.

"Pulling round now?" asked the man.

"How did I get here?"

He told her he had carried her.

She sipped the water, then gave him the cup again. He reached down and put it on the floor beside him.

" A weight," sighed Judith.

" Pooh, a feather," he laughed. " But it was lucky you had stood up. You fainted you know, and I had to carry you like . . . like a sack of corn."

She sat up, away from him now. She had beautiful hair, a dark gold, and there was a perfume in it. Her hat lay under the table.

" Yes," the man nodded briskly, " I was the lost shepherd — no, I was the shepherd and you the lost lamb, on my shoulders. Really! But there was nobody passing. If your foot is swelling I'd better take your riding boot off at once, or it may be difficult."

" I can do it." Judith took off her gloves, still with a good deal of languor, but tugging at the boot made her giddy and he had to kneel down and assist her. Then he drew off her stocking and looked at the swollen ankle.

" I've got some liniment, what about that? " he suggested.

" My . . . car . . ." suggested she.

" Ah, yes." But he got up from his knees, went to a shelf and brought a bottle of oil. The man hovered over the naked foot and rubbed oil upon the swelling. His fingers were long and thin, their touch was soothing. Occasionally he hurt her, but she was stoical and leaned back on the couch

watching his bent head. The fair hair was thick and tousled, his features brown and pleasant, a nice creature.

"It feels much better now," said Judith. "Do you live here? But of course you do."

"Yes," said he.

"Always?"

"Always."

"Alone?"

"Alone."

He was laconic. Judith sighed. "I wonder where my beast of a horse is?"

"Oh, he's galloped right out of the story," said the man. After a moment or two he continued: "Yes, alone. It is my habit to do so, it suits me."

Judith meditated. "Well, you have friends to visit you. It would be lonely otherwise."

"I have no friends." He gave the foot its final massage.

"Is that because you don't want them?" Judith was staring interestedly at her foot. "I'm sure that must be the reason."

He was picking up the cork and replacing it in the liniment bottle.

"O no, no," he said. "I do, I do."

Then he glanced at the clock on the shelf, it was nearly nine o'clock.

"I must go now, I am the schoolmaster," he explained, rising to his feet. "Directly I get to school I'll send a boy over to the Park and your car ought to be here in half an hour. You'll be quite all right here until then."

"I am very much obliged to you," said Lady Leeward.

He put on a coat and a hat, and took a stick from the corner.

"Shall I leave the door open?" He paused.

"Please," the lady answered.

"You might shut it when you go," he added.

"I will, yes," Judith nodded brightly.

"Good-bye. You'll be all right. Half an hour."

"Thank you so very much," said Judith.

She lay on the couch for a while, then she sat up. There were no pictures on the walls, but there was a shelf of books close at hand. Astronomy, he appeared to like, and moths. A lot of books about philosophy and history and yes, Socialism — dozens. Judith drew on her stocking. There was a horrid bulge at the ankle but it was much easier now. And the horse had galloped out of the story! No friends: *My mind to me a kingdom is.* What story? The lost lamb — over nine stone, too! Must be strong, never turned a hair.

The car came with her maid and a footman, they had come instantly without hats or coats. Her ladyship explained her accident, and then with their aid limped out to the car. The maid took the riding boot, the footman the hat from under the table.

"Wait a minute," cried Lady Leeward. "There's a bottle of liniment on the table. Just fetch it, Maude, will you."

When the liniment was safely stored the car turned and took them all away.

Had they telephoned for a doctor?

"No, my lady."

"Why not!" What fools servants were. "Well, it doesn't matter, don't." A hundred of them were not worth one sensible friend; they were willing but stupid, it was all a question of love. O dear, I did not even ask his name.

No, Maude did not know his name, but the footman said the schoolmaster's name was Jones. Judith sighed. How awful! It must be terrible for him. It would be impossible, utterly impossible to like a person with the name of Jones. Bones, groans, moans.

"Jones," she echoed.

"Yes, m'lady." The footman enlarged "Christopher Jones."

"Oh," the lady mused, "Christopher. Yes." The car entered the lodge gates and soon drew up at the Hall. Oh, there was a thing she had forgotten! And the chauffeur was sent flying back to close the door of Mr. Jones' cottage.

2

A few days later a letter was posted and delivered.

OLD HALL, LEEWARD PARK,
Thursday, Nov. 1.

Lady Leeward presents her compliments to Mr. Jones and desires to thank him for his recent great kindness. Her foot is almost well, but the injury still prevents her calling to thank Mr. Jones personally. If Mr. Jones could find it convenient to take tea with her on Saturday afternoon Lady Leeward would esteem it a very great pleasure.

The reply was as follows:

ROSE COTTAGE, FROGMOOR LANE.

Mr. Jones begs to acknowledge Lady Leeward's letter of the 1st, but regrets he is unable to accept her kind invitation. Mr. Jones is glad to

hear of Lady Leeward's recovery from her mishap.

"Heavens alive!" gasped Judith. And there the matter might very well have rested. But Fate himself would have a meagre business if human nature did not probe and prove him. The pitcher may go once too often to the well, but until that date there are no other such delightful journeys. What is a pitcher for — if not to fill. Or a well — but for the use we may make of what lies in the bottom of it.

OLD HALL, LEEWARD PARK,
Nov. 6.

DEAR MR. JONES,

I am sorry that I chose an unsuitable date. I am the most unlucky person in the world. May I try again? Will you come over at any time convenient to yourself? I should be so pleased.

Yours sincerely,
JUDITH LEEWARD.

The answer ran:

DEAR LADY LEEWARD,

It is very kind of you, but I feel sure that there are (if I could only think of them!) many rea-

sons why I am unable to come to tea at Old Hall. Please excuse me. Good luck to your foot.

Sincerely,

CHRISTOPHER JONES.

" What the . . . the deuce does that mean! Many reasons — unable — luck to your foot. Why foot! It's an extraordinary Jonesy letter, complete Jones — bones, moans, groans — Christopher, friendless man. O well, thank you, Jones, thank you very much."

So the next evening Lady Leeward drove herself over in the small car to Rose Cottage, Frogmoor Lane. It was some distance away from the village; why did the man poke himself away in such an absurd place, all by itself? It was as much as she could do to find it in the dark. She stopped the engine at his gate and hooted. There was a light from the window, but nobody answered her call. She had to get out of the car and walk up the black path, slipping off her gloves as she did it, and knock the door smartly with her knuckles.

" Come in," his voice cried, and she opened the door. There was a splendid fire on the hearth, a green silk shade on the lamp, it was cosy. And he — he was sewing! Sewing a piece of yellow stuff. With cotton and a needle.

"Do excuse me bursting in on you like this," began Lady Leeward, half-in and half-out of the doorway.

He quickly stood up, dropped the sewing on the chair behind him and went towards her with a smiling "Good evening." She found herself shaking hands with him as he said "Come in" again.

"No, no, I only came to. . . ."

"There's a draught," he said, glancing at his lamp flickering on the table. And so Lady Leeward walked in.

"What am I doing with this thimble?" she asked brightly. "I found it in my hand." She set a thimble on the table.

"It slipped off my finger," he explained, shutting the door. "Won't you sit down?"

"And it slipped into my hand!" She laughed again. "How funny!"

"Well, you write with a pen, you know, instead of your finger — won't you sit down? — and you sew with a thimble for the same reason."

"But it's funny to see a man sewing at all!"

"I don't do it often," he replied, "but I believe I follow all the rules. I can hemstitch, herringbone, and make a seam." He picked up the yellow stuff and showed her what he had been doing.

"It's quite good," said Lady Leeward. "What is this you are making — curtains!"

"For my window," he added.

Said the lady, bending over the sewing: "You must let me give you some."

"O no, no, no." So decidedly, she might have been offering him some infectious fabric. "Thank you, no, I prefer these home-made things."

"But I mean, I will make them for you myself."

"Thank you," he smiled, "but these will be all I want. Yes, thank you."

The lady looked astoundingly handsome, though exceedingly berobed in a heavy grey corduroy cloak with dark fur at the neck and wrists. A perfume seemed to float from her copper-coloured hair and her fine features had a rosy glow. She was not wearing a hat.

"Ah yes," with a mock sigh she shrugged her shoulders. "You are a self-sufficient man. That's why you have no friends."

"No friends!"

"You told me you had none."

"Oh, that was just bunkum." He moved a chair for her to use, as she still stood, rich and gracious, in the low-ceilinged room. She seemed to tower in, and pervade his home.

"No, thank you," said Lady Leeward. "I've only just run over to bring you this. I stole all your liniment, it was so good, and I've brought you another bottle. Thank you, so much."

"Oh," he murmured, with a deprecating gesture.

"My foot is quite well now. . . ."

"Good," he said.

". . . and that is entirely due to your treatment. I did not even call our doctor in."

"Risky, wasn't it?" suggested the schoolmaster.

"Was it? Well I didn't want to," she said, "I was in your good hands, and the lost lamb is very grateful to you." She moved to the door. "Good evening," she said, smiling and very handsome. He held her proffered hand for a moment, and then unlatched the door for her. The asters down the pathway glared lividly in the sudden light thrown upon them; her heavy cloak brushed them as she walked by. Outside his gate she stopped and glanced up and down the road, then at the sky. Miles away, a cloud hanging low over a lighted town shone like a cushion of luminous wool. He had followed her quietly down the path. It was a cold clear night, the stars rippled in the sky like diamonds on a bed of dark velvet. A wind threshed gently in the trees, and dry leaves ticked along the

road, running across the path of the headlights like little brisk tumbling gnomes. Lady Leeward squeezed herself into the little car and the schoolmaster fastened the door for her. Then she leaned towards him from under the hood, and it seemed as if all her imperious beauty had become tender in that close secrecy of the dark vehicle. He heard her whisper: "Come for a ride."

Instantly he said, "Yes," ran back to the cottage, put on an overcoat, turned down the lamplight, pulled to the door and so back to her, and away.

He could not tell whether they rode for an hour or for five minutes. They were fleeing from darkness, with a light under their feet — and they talked of the price and condition of hay. They discoursed of hay, sanfoin, clover, and old meadow, but they never chopped it into chaff. They were too absorbed for that. Of the price of hay, this year's, last year's, next year's hay, they speculated and prophesied; the time to mow it, and the way to make it. They found themselves hopelessly enmeshed, buried and swaddled in a great cock of hay. Like the ass-headed weaver they had a great desire, it seemed, to a bottle of it. So at last the lady stopped the car by the roadside, and turning to the man she said:

"Don't you think Mahomet might come to the mountain now?"

Mahomet prevaricated: "What do you mean?"

"I mean you did me a great kindness. I want to show that I'm not ungrateful."

"It isn't worth," he wavered, "not worth a cup of tea."

"No? Not to you. But I have my own sense of it."

He was silent, she was silent. Both stared ahead along the road where the further trees seemed to cringe from their light.

"Are you hungry?"

He was, yes, a little bit hungry; rushing through the air gave you an appetite.

"Good," she cried. "So am I. Now I'll take you to the Hall and we'll have a meal straight away."

"My . . . excuse . . . no, no," he ejaculated, stirring as if he were about to get out of the car.

"Why not?"

He did not answer.

"Do come."

"You see," he said, fumbling for words, "I'm not used to such things. You must let me off. I'm not dressed. I'm plebeian. You must excuse

me. Some other time. I'm not used to such things."

"What things!" she cried. "There's nobody to meet, not a single visitor." She brushed a strand of hair back from her cheek. "I'll get them to scrape up a meal for just you and me. We'll have something up on a tray, in my own room. Yes, yes, that's quite settled."

She edged in the clutch and the car ran on again, turned into the great park at the lodge gates and drew up at Lady Leeward's home. A shaft of light gleamed from the hall. A footman ran down the steps and stood by the car while they alighted.

"How bright the stars are!" Lady Leeward said. Jones did not answer, although he too looked up into the sky. The footman looked up into the sky and smiled. He followed them up into the huge hall that seemed all grey and white tiles, barometers, long clocks, shining brass and mahogany. The bewildered schoolmaster was bereft of his coat and hat by the footman, and then Lady Leeward ushered him along to the library, a room furnished in dark heavy sumptuousness, leather and black oak, with sere busts on the tops of the bookcases, glasses of stuffed fish hanging in recesses, and family portraits huge and gloomy. A bright fire was there.

"What will you drink?" she asked, opening a cupboard where there were decanters.

"I . . . no, thank you."

"A cigarette?" There was a silver box.

"No, thank you."

"There are a few books." She nodded towards the cases as she lit a cigarette for herself. "Can you amuse yourself with them for ten minutes — there are lots of astronomy and history — until supper is ready. I don't know about philosophy, but I'm sure there's no Socialism."

"Yes. I will . . . see what I can see," he grinned.

"I must go and change," said Lady Leeward. "Excuse me for ten minutes."

The schoolmaster sat down and for a while pored mindlessly over an old volume of *Punch*. There was not a sound to be heard anywhere save the faint ticking of a china clock in a glass cover. He wondered if he might get up and steal away. The box of cigarettes was still open on the table beside him. He began to count them, but there were too many. His watch was three minutes ahead of that clock. He leaned forward and sat holding his head in his hands.

"Supper is ready, sir." The footman stood in the doorway. Jones got up and followed him along a corridor, with the incomparable and tragic tim-

idity of a nervous cricketer walking out from the pavilion to take his innings. In the midst of that green desert lurk eleven white sardonic harpies, and he walks as a man into the trap of death, one against many, but he dare not hurry and he may not lag.

At the end of another corridor across the hall he was shown into a room furnished with a heavy but bright sumptuousness. It was oblong, with huge white chimney-piece, pink silk lights, a smallish table laid with silver dishes, and wine. And Lady Leeward was standing by the fire dressed in a gown of black silk, pale stockings, black shoes with high red heels. He hovered vaguely in the room. The footman pulled out a chair at the table, and the lady came half-way across the room.

"Well," she asked, "did you find any disgraceful books?"

"I looked at *Punch,*" he replied, sitting down as she indicated.

"I like *Punch,*" remarked his hostess.

"Enthralling," the schoolmaster exclaimed.

There was a plate of cold pheasant and tongue before him. The servant helped him to salad.

"Claret, sir?" murmured the footman, and Jones nodded.

After putting another log of wood on the fire the footman went away, and the schoolmaster by constant sipping drank up his glass of claret.

"I am so glad you came."

"I did not come," he ventured, "I was abducted."

"O no, you were not!" She pushed the wine towards him and he refilled his glass. "Besides, what was I to do! You don't mind now?"

He laughed. "No, I am quite quite happy."

"Glad I am not so terrifying, after all."

He had begun to look about the room, at the couch of green velvet, the little black piano, the water-colours on the wall. But his glance came back to her and her sweetly innocent eyes. The red-gold hair that slightly curled was bunched in a thick casual roll on her neck. The black dress gave a lustre to the pale moulding of her shoulders and the graceful arms. There were a few jewels on her fingers, and from each ear hung a tiny chain of gold ending in a golden hollow ball; he could hear the tinkle of the pellets in them when she sharply moved her head.

"It was not you, no, no," he began to explain, "it was myself, my plebeian self. I never go out anywhere. I do not even know how to address you."

Lady Leeward fumbled with her bread; it seemed to amuse her.

"Formally?" she asked; then looking at him keenly with her marvellous eyes. "But what is it you want to say?"

"I mean your title, yes, and that sort of thing," he added, lamely.

She was really amused. "Oh, but my dear man! The servants say 'M'lady.' My friends call me what they like." She pushed her empty wine-glass towards him. "I've a dozen nicknames — give me a new one. Have some trifle?"

"Please," said he. He filled her glass and his own, and took the plate of trifle she handed him.

"Well?" She took up her dessert-spoon. "What is my name to be?" Her elbows rested on the table, she was smoothing the spoon with her finger and thumb. "Do you know, I don't care very much for your name."

The schoolmaster swallowed a portion of his trifle and laid the spoon carefully back on his plate.

"Which one?" he inquired.

Lady Leeward said: "Jones."

"That is not really my name," the schoolmaster replied.

She looked at him inquiringly: "Not!" And

then eagerly: "You are going to tell me you are a prince in disguise! I guessed it!"

"Ha, ha, no. My real name is a hideous one. So I changed it many years ago."

"But 'Jones'! Why did you change to Jones? It's so . . . so . . . I mean it's like jumping out of the frying-pan into the stove."

And Mr. Jones mused: "Humph, perhaps so. But it was a question of good taste, I did not want to make spurious capital out of that opportunity. I chose the commonest name I could think of."

"What *is* your dreadful name?"

"My name?" He paused to drink again, then with burlesque solemnity he said: "My name is Death."

Her vivacity was a little quenched. "Really?" She peered earnestly at him, spinning the stem of her glass between finger and thumb, and he bowed assent. "How lugubrious! Yes, you were right to change it — for anything."

They had finished with the trifle, and were bedevilling the oranges and nuts. The perfume she exhaled came, he thought, from her splendid hair — may-blossom after warm showers.

"My maiden name was Catterick."

"Scotch?" he inquired.

"No. Suffolk," said the lady.

"Well," he was picking a stubborn nut from its shell. "I can't call you that."

"No." She was parting an orange in her plate; her gaze was concentrated upon that object.

"I can't stand calling you Lady Leeward. I hate titles."

"Socialist! But yes, they are a great bore. Don't you like my Christian name?"

"No."

"Why not?" asked Judith, still intent upon her orange.

"She cut off the head of her lover."

Lady Leeward stared up uncomprehendingly for some moments. "O . . . you mean that Judith . . . in the Bible . . . and that Holofernes man. Ah, I promise not to do that."

In the tingling silence that followed she began to blush, and to cover her confusion she raised her glass towards him.

"Here's to you . . . Christopher!"

He raised his until it clinked with hers, and he murmured: "To you, Judy." She sought his hand across the table.

And then the footman arrived with the coffee, and a maid to clear the table.

Coffee was served to them on the green velvet couch, and while the servants were clearing the

table the lady chatted to Mr. Jones of those interesting things in her house which she desired to show him on some other occasion. It was an old house, an admiral had built it after the naval victory at La Hogue. William and Mary's reign. Sixteen ninety something.

"You like old furniture?"

"No," said the schoolmaster. The servants withdrew so quietly that he did not perceive their going.

"Are there any legends about the place?" he asked.

"No, there are none that I know of."

"Or ghosts?"

"No. No legends or ghosts. The Leewards have always, as they say, feared God and honoured the King. Always. Doing nothing magnificent, and no wrong thing."

Jones put his coffee cup carefully aside and said:

"Your neighbours, you know, do just the opposite." He leaned back into a corner of the couch, crossed his legs and clasped his hands across one high knee. A sort of wry grin appeared upon his face. Lady Leeward had already noticed that his features seldom presented anything so soft, so tender, as a smile. Yes, he was a satirical creature, downright and indubitable; and there was a lack

of breeding even in the expression of his sympathies, they did not flow in a gentle crystal spring, but in a fountain of brine. And yet. . . . When she asked him who, precisely, he meant by her neighbours he retorted:

"The country folk, the poor, Hodge, the cowman, the ploughman. They do everything magnificently, but they do nothing right — the poor preposterous poor!"

Lady Leeward took a cigarette, the guest refused one. "Oh, the villagers! You are unjust to them, aren't you?" She waited for Jones to offer her a light, but he did not notice this. "What have they done wrong? On the whole I find them charming, yes, very industrious. O no, O no. What do you find wrong about my neighbours?"

Jones said: "They've kept the cuckoo in their nest."

She struck a match and puffed meditatively at the cigarette. "Cuckoo!" It puzzled her; there were one or two cases of infidelity in the village, it was true, but. . . . "What on earth do you mean?"

"I mean, that the village pipits have maintained and cherished the Leeward cuckoo for — so you tell me — over two hundred years."

She blew out a long puff of smoke. "Oh, I get

your meaning. Humph, you *are* a Socialist! I'm the wicked cuckoo then. That is not very complimentary to me."

"Neither is it," he said grimly, "complimentary to them."

"And you think it is all wrong?"

"Both grand and wrong," said Jones.

"Nature," continued Lady Leeward, "created the real cuckoos, that's a natural precedent."

"Ah," he sighed, "you're still in a state of nature rather than of grace."

"It is no bad thing if you are born to be a Leeward. I prefer it. One might have been a Jones — or a Brown or Robinson. There had to be a cuckoo."

"Yes, that's the grandeur of it," murmured he.

"You see," she went on eagerly, "you can't all be leaders, some must be servants in a world like ours. And as the Bible says, *They also serve who only stand and wait.*"

"Bible! Bah! They always wait who only stand and serve!"

"You're an atheist, too, then?"

"No, I'm not," the schoolmaster's tone was gruff. "It isn't in the Bible, it's Milton."

"I must own that I prefer a gentleman to a peasant. In the long run you'll find he is the better.

Breeding counts. The important thing in life is to be well-bred."

"Ah! Take care of the parents and the offspring will pay for itself."

Nothing could be more charming than her patience. "These village people are nice things to have in a landscape, or to read about in books, but what is there inside them? They have mean souls, mean minds, they are musty in body and brain. They lie and shuffle, steal, scandalize, flatter and deceive. And that is because their souls are mean."

"Or how else," he blandly inquired, "could you have deceived them for so long? Whether the pipit was made for the cuckoo, or the cuckoo for the pipit, cuckoos there are and they thrive on the blood of the poor. Hasn't the cuckoo a mean soul? Does it not live meanly?"

"Do you really think that's the sort of person I am?" Her voice was soft, velvety.

He replied, with the nearest thing to a smile that he ever achieved. "I assure you I am speaking quite impersonally."

Judith shook her head distrustfully. "No, you are not. But what do you take us for? We have the best of things because we are the better people. We have the advantage because we have developed

the finer type; it's like the flower of a tree, what comes to the top after centuries, the seed of culture, courage, integrity, all the higher things the race is capable of. I don't mean that we alone possess them, but that we have promoted and conserved them. And that would only be possible in a leisured class, the possibility of it even would be gone without us. . . ."

He intervened: "In one word you mean the gentry are a national profit?"

She hesitated: "I don't like that one word, but in general we haven't mean souls, we can be trusted, we are stanch, our word is a pledge to death. Esprit de corps, and so on. But I suppose you would deny that?"

He would: "To add my weak word to the verdict of history, justice, and commonsense," he said, "would be superfluous."

Was he angry? She could not tell. She felt angry, but she was sure it was not with him. Yet you could scarcely be angry with yourself.

"Oh, stop this, please!" she suddenly cried. "Why, what are we arguing about? Why have we drifted into such a discussion, it's snobbish of me."

Judith went over to the little black piano and let her fingers ripple over the keys. Without turning round she called to him:

"I did not mean one word of what I said about them."

As he made no answer she played a pretty phrase or two over and over again, then stopped, and facing him said:

"Neither did you."

Ah, but he did! And there was no doubt that he meant it. Again primping on the piano, she exclaimed:

"I wish you did not think such things, you are wrong about us, you know. I wonder when I shall see you again. You look on me as 'the enemy,' I suppose. I am going away soon."

At last he stood at her side, saying he must go, yes, really he must go.

"Bannerman shall take you in the car," said Lady Leeward.

"No, no," protested Christopher Jones. He preferred to walk, much, yes, truly.

Lady Leeward then put on a cloak of yellow velvet trimmed with white fur and went along to the hall with the schoolmaster. He put on his coat and then the lady said she would walk with him to the lodge gates for a breath of air if the night were fine. The night was fine. The lodge gates were a quarter of a mile away, and the road dark though the sky was sparkling. It lay between trees and

he walked slowly, warily, as if at any moment he might put his foot through the crust of the earth into the next world. The lady slipped her arm into the schoolmaster's and immediately they began to hurry. They walked quickly, step to step.

"Why are you going so fast?" whispered Judith. Then they stopped, quite still, and without a word the schoolmaster pulled her quickly to him with both his arms.

"O be careful, Jones! Chris, be careful," murmured the lady, returning his kisses. "Why — you have gone mad, anyone could see me in this cloak."

The madman only pressed her lips more fondly, with little moans of tenderness.

"Listen," she breathlessly gasped. "I'll write to you. Will you write to me? Chris, Chris! I must go. O be careful. I must. Good-bye. I will write."

She swung out of his arms, and began to walk steadily back to the Hall, while he stood watching her, mumbling: "Lovely she is. I am a boor, she is a queen."

For ten days he hungered, in fevers of anticipation, for that something which hung in the air between them. As to what that was, Jones would not permit himself to gaze too deeply: was it a flame too bright for his eyes, or a mere mist of ecstasy? Jones only knew that his mind and emo-

tion, thought, desire, and fear, were charged with an image of her splendour, her friendliness and frankness. Of course she had been right to defend her class from his trite gibes, she herself was the living proof against him. No Pharisee, no, she was no Pharisee, though she was surely " not as these other are." The poor *were* mean, and the highborn *were* fine, though the claim of the underclass was age-old and unconfutable. But she did not write to him, why did she not write to him? And he could not see her again, she was beyond his reach; he did not even hear of her, she was beyond his range. Yes, and beyond him in everything, beauty, position, pride, and beyond him — O unalterably! — beyond him in love. How had it come about that he, a son of the people — yes, that was his own grandiloquent appellation — should have leaned to take one step in an intrigue, a dishonourable intrigue, with one of the class he had been born to despise? As the days slunk by his fervour, unabated, swerved to meet his own cynical challenge; she had been only too right about social quality and tone, it was he who had been the offensive snob, he had begun it, he had scoffed at the " honour " of her class and had paraded the " honour " of his own. And then he had tempted her! What a lesson! You could not trust a boor with an agree-

able lady. Judith had dropped him like a hot coal. And how that coal still flamed. *My name is Death!* Bah, you fine phrasing fellow, now you have caught a tartar. What a lesson, Oh, what a lesson!

And then there came a letter. From abroad. From the South of France. She did not explain that annihilating transit, but she called him her dear Chris. He was — she wrote — so wise, so experienced, so sympathetic about the poor, it had moved her very deeply, and she longed to know more, and much more about himself. He was to tell her all about himself. And she signed: *Yours, Judy.*

In his quick reply he threw serenity to the dogs, gave pride, gave scruple, the discard — his bubbling, baffled blood told him he was lost — he wanted passionately to know why she had gone, and when she was coming back.

Lady Leeward moved serenely eastwards in the South of France, and at Christmas she had gone into Switzerland for the winter sports. She was travelling with friends. Many letters passed between them; hers were tender, his were ardent. It was unwise — she wrote — for him to keep her letters. She entreated him to burn hers as soon as read, just as she was doing. He obeyed, with the feeling of a devout man forced to commit a violent sacrilege. Then she went on to Italy and the de-

spairing schoolmaster feared that she would not come back again until Sir Gulistan was home from his hunting in Africa. But he did not ask her about that; he dared not ask himself why he feared Sir Gulistan's return. February went, March went, April came. At last she was coming home! By then the tree-tops in the lane were just heaps of waving buds, petulant when the skies were grey or white, but when the sun shone and the breezes blew them in that bold cerulean air they were angelic, unearthly; the twirl of the universe was in their movement. And they would ripen, when she came, as if their whole body was one enchanting fruit. The schoolmaster set his small house in order, day by day, with marvellous care. When he laid his white sheets on the grass to air they had an immensity that surprised him. And when May was near Judith came home once more to the Hall in the park.

3

The western bounds of Leeward Park were determined by a wide dense wood, and from the wood stretched a heathery moor wherein lay many dells of greensward and dense of furze. In the middle of the moor, at a distance of nearly a mile from *Old Hall* rose a small grassy hill crowned with

a dozen dark pines. Whatever its geological significance might have been Black Knoll had no known historical or legendary affiliations; its contour was comely, its situation singular, and its loneliness endowed it with charm or the reverse according to the mood of the passer-by. It was this remote spot that Judith indicated for their place of meeting, enjoining the utmost secrecy and caution upon the schoolmaster. He was to be there at eight o'clock, there would be a moon, and she would come to him by the pathway through Leeward Wood that led from the park to the moor. On the appointed evening he stole there by unaccustomary paths, avoiding the village. The evening air was so mild that it quivered when the evening bells of S. Nicholas shook their melancholy note into it, and a long shroud of white fume from the allotment fires dispersed laterally without movement, meditating. After a while the schoolmaster came to a road leading from the village. A young bedraggled woman was sitting on a bank there as if she was waiting for some one. At Jones' approach she got up and walked a few yards behind him.

"Mister!" she whined, "will you give me something for a night's lodging?"

He stopped and gave her a shilling. Then they

walked on together for a few moments in the dusk until some one advanced along the road towards them. The woman stopped and turned fearfully: "Christ, is that Jimmy?" she whispered. The schoolmaster looked ahead. "That's the shoemaker," said he. "Oh," sighed the woman, relieved, "is it?" Jones laughed and the woman laughed and they moved on again.

"Good-night, George," said Jones in reply to the passing shoemaker, and the beggar-woman commented:

"Shoemaker! Well, it don't much matter what it is, to get a living is all a worry."

"Ah," agreed the schoolmaster. "But I turn off here, good-night."

"God bless you," said the woman, and he left her in the road and took a footpath beside a hedge. He did not hear her footsteps resume their march along the road; perhaps she was watching him, but he could not tell if this was so because of a bend in the hedge path. By and by he came to another road and beyond it Leeward Great Wood began, shaped in a half-circle curling round the park. Jones did not enter the wood, but advanced along its outside contour until he came to the moor, and there, suddenly closer, loomed Black Knoll. He climbed its easy slope and reached the

pines and there he waited. The moon was high aloft in the windless air. Passionate moon! The man waited and the lady came wrapped in a dark cloak.

Oh, for weeks this promised assignation had been their fiery secret, and now the encounter was cool — How d'ye do? — almost polite, but once they moved into the shadow of the grove they seemed to leap and melt into a wordless unity, a thing of lips but no tongue. But what is this? He swung her back to the light again to behold her beautiful hair cropped in a new foreign fashion. At the edge of the trees they sat side by side on a thick mat of pine needles, conversing about her travels, but in a little while when they had fallen to whispering they lay down together. Her arms stole round his neck, and his hands went rudely caressingly about her until Judy threw off her cloak and they took the ultimate embrace.

At a later moment the lady sat up and uttered a sound of dismay. " Somebody has been watching us! " A dark figure was running from the shadows of Leeward Wood towards them. Twice it stopped and looked, its face a pallid spot before the moonlight, and then ran stumbling on, skirting the knoll until it passed out of their sight, lost among the bushes.

"Who is it?" asked the startled Judith.

"He saw nothing," her lover assured her, "he was too far away. He was unaware of us, a poacher, I fancy. Something in the wood alarmed him, perhaps. He could not see us."

"I hope not; it must never be known, Chris. Let us go now."

Jones lifted her to her feet with tender joy, she put on her cloak again, and they descended the hill and crossed over the moor to Leeward Wood. He was to go with her as far as the wall on the other side. They entered the dark glades, away from that passionate moonlight, and walked in the paths stealthily, never speaking, but only clasping each other. In a quarter of an hour they came to the wall and the private door into the park. Judith took a key from a pocket in her cloak and unlocked the door, and the holy radiance of the moon burst on them again. There lay the smooth choice park with its flint wall stretching to right and left of them and trees curving benignantly over it, and across the grass, a quarter of a mile away, was her home, the great Hall. There were lights shining in a few of the windows in the wing that was in shadow.

"I do not want to go there," Judith murmured. "I would stay here for ever with you," and she

pulled him back behind the dark secrecy of the wall and hung silently against his breast.

"You will never speak of this, dear Chris, not to a living soul. You'll swear it?"

"How could you imagine it of me!" he asked reproachfully.

"I know, I know; but men do love to boast of their conquests."

"Not I."

"I trust you, beloved. Think of my reputation. Are you . . . aren't you hungry?"

He laughingly reminded her that she had asked him the same question on their first night together in the car. But he had eaten little to-day.

"Nor I. I was too excited. I knew," she whispered, "I knew we were going to love." She peeped into the park again. "It isn't far. Wait. Will you wait? I will go and fetch something to eat and we will have a moonlight picnic, eh? You must be starved, poor dear. What is the time?"

It was ten o'clock.

"Keep the door shut while I am gone," said she, "and wait only a tiny time."

She stepped boldly and quickly across the park. Carefully Jones closed the door and waited behind it in the shadow thrown by the wall, listening to

little scratching movements in the undergrowth. The moonlight glared above the wall and there was a sort of terror in the unshaking shadows of some of those skeleton trees; that radiance from aloft lay upon their trunks like scrofulae. But there was a wild cherry tree blooming alone there; the moonbeams caressed its bosomed whiteness with a lustre infinitely precious and pure. To the waiting anxious lover it seemed that his lady had gone out of this fantasy of time and the miracle of space; it was not possible that she would return, but he would wait and wait, under the wild white cherry tree. It had the gleam of her breasts and her smooth tremulous limbs. And though all her beauty and richness had been crumpled in passionate disarray, she had been strangely triumphant. How nonchalant that witnessing moon!

Across the park she came flitting back to him. Under her cloak Judith had brought a bag with slices of plum cake.

"Look!" she whispered gaily; there was a bottle.

"What is it?" he asked.

"Champagne," said she breathlessly. "Isn't it a lark! I couldn't get anything else without making a fuss. We'll go just inside the park, it's lighter, and we can sit under a yew tree; the grass is dry.

Chris, break the neck off the bottle in here, quietly, and then come over to the yew tree."

Judith darted off into the park. "And Chris, shut the door after you," she cautiously called. Having done these things he joined her under the tree and they quaffed the wine from her collapsible drinking cup. For an hour they lay and lingered there, and before parting, there had been a repetition of that flaring passion of the pine knoll.

"Chris, have I given myself too easily — will you despise me?"

Her melting tenderness exalted him: "Judy, Judy!"

"Oh, take care!"

"I'll be mum as the grave."

"My dear secret lover!"

Jones drew off her shoe and stocking and kissed the foot he had once comforted.

"Take," she whispered at last, "that empty bottle with you and heave it somewhere into the wood; mustn't leave it here. And Chris, remember: be discreet, I am far too fond of you."

As she stole away from him he stood in the shadow of the tree, with the bottle clutched in his hands, watching her all the way until she was lost

in the gloomy angle of the Hall. What was the curious fear in his heart as he turned away? That this was the end of it, that she would never, never come again, and he was lost, lost, lost for evermore! By the time he had got safely into the wood again he was happy, and in his exhilaration he flung the bottle with all his might among the trees. Stupid ass! He flung it carelessly and gashed the palm of his hand on its splintered neck. The blood streamed. Wrapping his handkerchief against his palm he hurried on. There was no pain, nothing could pain him now, with all that fostering bliss in the heaven of a world. Sometimes he broke into a run, so exhilarated was he. When he reached home it was midnight and, going at once to bed, he fell into a dreamless sleep.

Three days later he was arrested for murder.

4

In Leeward Great Wood the body of an unknown woman of the tramping class had been found; she had been violated and then murdered by a cruel blow from a stake on the back of her skull. It would be tedious to follow in detail the process by which suspicion fell upon the schoolmaster, but it will be seen that he was himself

largely to blame for the position he was in when the local court committed him. Briefly, the woman was the beggar woman to whom he had given a shilling, and she was killed on the night he and Judith had met on Black Knoll. Absolutely nothing was known of the woman; it was as if she had just sauntered into the world of Christopher Jones for a few moments and blasted it. The salient pieces of incriminating evidence were these. A shoemaker, as we know, had seen Jones walking with the woman on the fatal evening, Jones explained that matter. He had gone out for a stroll and the woman, a stranger, had accosted him and begged a shilling from him. He had given her a shilling and left her standing in the road. He did *not* know that she had, as the shoemaker declared, followed him down the hedge path to Leeward Great Wood. The accused man declared that he had walked past Leeward Wood, quite alone, and gone to the Black Knoll. While resting there he had seen a man run out of Leeward Wood in a suspicious way, but he had not passed close enough for Jones to recognize him, or describe him; then he had returned home. Another witness had seen Jones enter the wood with a woman between nine and nine-thirty on that night. Jones emphatically denied that. It was certainly himself and Judith

who had been seen, but he dared not implicate her. Witness was certain it was Jones he saw, but the woman was a stranger; it was full moonlight and he had been sitting on a stile not twenty yards from the entrance to the wood. Another person had seen Jones near his home just before midnight. He was running. It seemed to Jones that the world that night had been crowded with spying eyes. He swore that he had reached his home at nine o'clock. Then a handkerchief of his, soaked with blood, had been found in the path not very far from the body. Jones could not deny that the handkerchief was his, but he could not explain that he must have dropped it while running, or that it was his own blood.

Jones was bewildered by the astounding circumstances that implicated him. It was unthinkable that an innocent man could be convicted of this crime, but it looked as if Judith might be drawn into it if he were not very careful. Otherwise he was not unduly alarmed. He was, indeed, more deeply moved because he was hurried into prison just as he had attained a topmost peak of joy. Until the trial was over the intolerable separation must be endured. Pending any move from Judith — and he could not know what course she would be desirous of pursuing — he maintained

this untrue version of his movements. There was time enough, if the worst incredibly came to the worst . . . well . . . of course . . . then . . . well, they would have to see . . .

So Christopher Jones endured the ordeal of his trial with stoicism, if not with a quite clear conscience. None knew of his secret meeting with Judith on Black Knoll, and not all the King's horses nor all the King's men should drag that knowledge from him until she signified her submission to his supreme need. And he had never a doubt of her, only a vague wonder, until he was condemned to be hanged by the neck until he was dead. The crashing doom, the appalling certainty, moved him only to a grinding silent ironic commination of the great lady who feared God and honoured the King. The queenly thing was a carcass stuffed with rags. It was not God alone then whom she so falsely feared, and if she honoured the King she could yet shame the King's justice! This was what *her* breeding, culture, courage, integrity came to when encountering a terrific fact that could not veil their shame. As for *his,* he would have to teach her a lesson, a great lesson. Horrible! Her infatuation with her " good name " had doomed him to death. Ancient Judith cut off her lover's head! Her pride of caste was a tyrannous fiction, a foible, without

ultimate quality. Honour, fine thinking, fine doing, were in the blood of those she despised. His pride should triumph. Perhaps, in the end, it was less pride than pity, and more love than either. He had but to lift a finger, a little tiny finger — but let her be comforted! For her to have declared the truth would have been a glory indeed. For him to declare it would be infamy. That was how it worked. Poor, poor Judith, she had failed. Poor heroic dunce, need he fail too?

The whole village was saddened by his fate; even those villagers who had betrayed him believed in him, somehow, against all reason. All remembered his kindness, his honesty, his queerness. Pots of paint! Every month he had given the best boy in his classes a pot of paint. "If you have no other use for it," he would say to the boy, "you could paint your front door with it." Each month the paint was of a different colour, and that was how the cottage doors had come to have the bright hues that so surprised casual visitors. He had painted the village not red, but green and purple, blue and orange. Butterflies! At the summer fête a year or two ago Lady Leeward had presented the prizes and at the close of that function half a dozen of Jones' boys had come forward, each bearing a cardboard box. As they came

up to her ladyship the boys had opened the boxes — they were full of living butterflies. The boys had cast the butterflies into the air above the great lady, and while they hovered, fluttered and wandered about her the people had cheered. But pots of paint and butterflies are no defences against the assaults of misfortune.

Meanwhile Judith had lived in such anguish of love and shame, and agony of fear so great, that her beauty melted from her like a white cloud in the blaze of noon. With a thousand equivocations she cajoled her conscience. Perhaps, after all, he *had* committed the foul crime. She did not, could not, know, no one would ever know. The evidence was overwhelming, and he had not communicated with her, he had lied and lied and lied. To save such a man she would have to betray her husband and their kindred, far-reaching subtle ruin. Why need she reveal anything yet? Not yet, all might yet be cleared up and he would be saved without her sacrifice. He would be sure to disclose the truth sooner or later, and when *he* did so she would accept it, confirm it, she would not deny it. But one white fact shone through all her sophistries with blinding ray — he had not betrayed her. Perhaps her one sincere but deeply hidden wish was that he *would* tell; beyond that one possibility

of escape for him her mind could not dare to grope. When she learned the dreadful issue of the trial she determined to flee away, she could not rest, neither night or day, with such a sword plunging into her heart, but after making preparations flesh and blood failed her, her spirit was wrecked, and she was carried to her bed, and her physician summoned from London. He was an old bachelor, a friend of Sir Gulistan's, and he slept at the hall for a while. On the day before Jones was to die Judith gulped down a dose of poison, veronal or some such drug to which high-born women seem to have easy access. On the table by her bedside she had left a sealed letter addressed to the doctor marked "*Open immediately.*" When it was discovered what Judith had done Dr. Paton Cope, an exceedingly capable man despite the fact that he had himself suffered from hernia for twenty years, plunged after the poisoned woman as Orpheus plunged after Eurydice. He saw the letter and he scrambled it into his pocket. She lay in a state of coma for three days, and if the spirit really goes awandering at such times Heaven knows what frightful visitation the soul of Judith made. This was her letter: the doctor read it when he was quite alone, in Sir Gulistan's study.

DEAR PATON,

I am going to poison myself. There is no way out, a horrible thing is killing me, so horrible that it is only a question of a few hours one way or the other. I shall die in any case. There is nothing more for me to do except write this letter and confess everything. That is so difficult. I made the acquaintance of Christopher Jones some months ago; he did me a great kindness when I was thrown once at hunting. I liked him at once, he was curiously *good,* a high-minded though low-spirited man. And he was friendless, and I was lonely. Now he has been convicted of the murder of a wretched tramp-woman. Well, he had nothing whatever to do with that, but I am the only person who knows it. He has been wrongly condemned. He is *innocent.* He knows that I know it, but he will not call me because my own evidence would involve me so seriously. It would be so easy for him. When I was abroad we wrote long loving letters, we were in love, and when I came back I was mad to see him again. I do not love him now, I hate him. I hate his fearful generosity. I am in a trap. I am angry, not sorry at all, angry that I have got to die, more angry that I have got to die because of some stupid mistake, and most angry of all because it is no use dying unless I tell you why.

It is impossible to tell a thing like this and go on living. And I can't live any longer. There are times when that hysterical statement is true. On the night of this horrible murder we had arranged to meet at Black Knoll at eight o'clock. We had not seen each other for months and we had been writing — Oh, the things men and women do write! We met there, the most beautiful evening in all time. Moonlight and spring. It was wonderful. Kisses and caresses were not enough, it was all wild and impetuous, and there we were lovers. You *understand,* real lovers. I gave everything, willingly. It was no time to think of honour. After all, my honour is my own, to do what I like with. That is why I throw it away now, for *nothing.* I loved him passionately then. I do not love him now. I hate him as I hate myself. Afterwards we saw a man break out from the wood and run away as if he was afraid of something. It must have been *that* man who killed the woman. She was killed while we were loving. We walked back together in the lovely moonlight, through Leeward Park to the gate in the park wall, and then we did not want to leave each other. Even then. He said he was hungry, so I went across to fetch something from the house. I could only get a bottle of champagne and some cake. We sat under a yew tree just in-

side the park, and after we had drunk the champagne it was all so magical and still, the grass cold and soft. A long way off a bird was making a long frantic purring noise. Again there was kissing and embracing, and once again we were lovers. So you see it was impossible for him to have done this thing to that woman, for twice that night he had been my lover. He was with me. She was already dead. She was lying in the wood beyond the wall, dead, as I shall be dead in an hour. It was past eleven o'clock when I left him. I told him to take the empty bottle away and throw it in the wood, and I see it must have been that bottle which gashed his hand so dreadfully. I have not seen him since. I dared not go to the trial, I dared not, I dared not, you must realize that. There is another thing besides. I know now that I am with child. If I live I should have *his* child. Gulistan has been away for months. I am in a trap whichever way I turn. What mad, mad irony! Do you see, that child itself is the proof of its father's innocence.

This is all true, quite true, the whole truth, so help me God. I am not mad, I am quite calm, I do not love him now. I have no feeling but rage, rage against these evil circumstances, everything is so stupid, stupid, stupid. I can only free him by doing what I am going to do. You must take all

the necessary steps, old friend, at once. He has risked everything to keep my name out of this affair, but that must not matter now. As I said, my honour is my own. I did what I liked with it. This is all I can do now. Tell him from me that he was right after all, he will remember and understand.

Good-bye Paton.

Good-bye Gulistan.

These are the last words of Judith Leeward.

Good-bye Chris.

P.S. — I *did* love him, and O my God I love him *now*.

The doctor was confounded. He was a tall, slightly stooping, rather ascetic man, with high, bare brow and pince-nez. Sour though his features looked he had a pleasant voice and pleasant manner. He was highly esteemed.

" It's preposterous," he murmured, " of course, it's preposterous."

Again he read the letter, and again certain passages.

" Pooh, impossible, my dear Judith, impossible. Sheer neurotic dementia. If ever there was a woman free from erotomania I should have said it was Judith, you know. It's this long separation from Gulistan, ought to have gone with him.

Highly strung, nervous state, sex hallucinations playing the devil. They play the devil with you."

Once more he read the letter.

"By Jove, yes, it *is* impossible. Never was a clearer case against a scoundrel. I'll get rid of this."

Paton Cope stooped over the fire and dropped the letter in. It burnt to a grey trembling ash.

"Neurotic dementia," repeated the doctor. "Must get Gulistan back at once. Neurotic dementia."

The following day he began efforts to get into touch with Judith's husband, but they proved to be all in vain, for poor Sir Gulistan had been stung by a poisonous insect in East African Territory and suffered a most unhappy end. The great lady was ill for a week or two longer, then she recovered. At a safe interval much later, Paton Cope questioned her about the letter. What letter? She did not understand, did not quiver an eyelid. He dropped the subject and congratulated himself. Paton Cope was fond of her. Certainly she never had a child. Perhaps some day she will marry him.

THE TWO WRETCHES

I

LIKE MOST IMAGINATIVE MEN HE WAS CAPABLE of violent but secret antagonisms; he could not sleep for anger if a person he disliked had been affable to him. Lubin Dawes was young, good-looking, fairly well-to-do, and he had many admirers, but none so warm as George Shrivenham, a pallid person with pale eyebrows, pale hair and pale moustache, the rims of his glasses adding a further lustre to his unillustrious blondness. George was a rock of steadiness, a mound of constancy.

"I have known him all my life," George would say, with an adoptive air. "David and Jonathan over again. If anything happened to old Lubin I should be stricken, lost, absolutely."

Lubin would confess to somebody else, whom he probably regarded in much the same way: "He's a bore, and his fondness is a nuisance; I don't ask for it and don't want it, but I submit to it. You know? I can't hurt his feelings, and it's most annoying."

They had been born in the same year in the same neighbourhood in the same middle-class world. George's father was proprietor of a num-

ber of ham and beef counters in the metropolis, dozens of places where you could sit on a high stool and buy beer: Shrivenham's. Their consumption of mustard alone annually exceeded a ton. Shrivenham's! The Lubin Dawes's were more austere, an Anglo-Something Corporation, with offices in Lothbury.

For twenty years Lubin had never quite escaped the kindly tendrils of George's affection; he had not vividly wished to. Nothing could have been more spontaneous, more genial, more flattering than George's affection: but in the course of time Lubin paid a visit to America. During his absence of almost two years the acquaintance, so far as indicated by the exchange of any correspondence, totally lapsed, and when he came back to England he heard that George was married. If the fact was something of a blow to the once idolized friend it became something almost incomprehensible when he met Sylvia Shrivenham, for in addition to being a beautiful woman, she had, to his perception, a very attractive intelligence. He dutifully congratulated George upon his great good fortune — he did so with a gusto of the jolliest in the presence of the lady herself — but he was in some way deeply annoyed. If he had remained in England it would probably have been the same, probably, but

in the presence of her very great personal charm he found himself dimly regretting that he had ever gone to America at all, it was a thousand pities, she was really a lovely woman, she made him think of all sorts of extraordinary things. Easy to see why George had dropped him out of his regard while he was far away, and he found it hard to forgive; he had heard nothing, not a word, not a rumour, and no announcement had reached him in America. It was true that he himself had never once written to George (dear old chap!) but still, why had he behaved with such secrecy? The more he speculated upon George's silence, George's negligence, George's success, the more annoyed he became, and so, in spite of George's entreaties and Sylvia's fascination, Lubin seldom paid the Shrivenham's a visit.

In the course of a year he developed an attachment to a young widow named Anna who had a flat in Fulham and a striking appearance. Lubin had known her years before, when she was quite a girl. Even in those days, accompanied always by an ungainly old goose of a mother, her bizarre appearance was a familiar and admired image to the youthful Lubin. She had used to dress in a brilliant but not impeccably beautiful style. Beautiful herself she was not, and her brilliance had lain very

inarticulately upon her, but in the poise of her body there was the last touch of seduction. As if she had been conscious of this her slant eyes were dull with a cool hauteur. She drew every man's gaze but no one's love except Lubin's, and it appeared she had never even noticed him. He had fancied that some barren-headed rich old fool would fall grovellingly in love with her (It happened) and would marry her (He did) and she would then decline and become like her mother, who resembled a baggage (In this he was mistaken). Her first marriage was a triumph, her stupid husband had quickly died, and having once escaped from her cherishing mother Anna kept her banished. Now, here she was, waiting, as you might say, for some one to pick her up again. Lubin did so.

He did not tell George of his own marriage for some time, and when he did tell him he was, perhaps, just a little tired of the experience. Anna was deficient in stamina. Without active ill-health, she was devoid of every enthusiasm as an apple is of gravy, and would lie about reading novels rather than do the hundred and one things adorable young new wives are supposed to do. All the more readily, therefore, did Lubin meet George's very friendly overtures: the wives were made

known to each other and all seemed fairly on the way to the establishment of a charming relationship, when the affair began to languish in a terrifying formality. It mystified Lubin. He delighted to be in the society of the gracious Sylvia, but there was a flavour about it all that denoted the merest social acquaintanceship, not friendship, not the old cherished tie. George and Anna, frank and friendly, called each other by their Christian names, but neither he nor Sylvia could advance so far, they were friendly but not friends, neither of them. It was delicacy of the quaintest kind. As far as he and George were concerned all was well again between them, all was as before, but he wanted to be as much to Sylvia as he was to George, even to be as much to her as George himself was. And that he could not be.

But George had wonderful ideas: at Whitsuntide they snatched a whole week and the two families went away together for a village holiday in Buckinghamshire. They lodged magnificently in the roomy house of a farm bailiff, in a neighbourhood which was a model of pastoral delights, rivers and woods and fields and lanes and hills, nothing very original or distinguished, but all of splendid appearance and of undoubted quality.

At first it was dull, Sunday is never a handsome

day, Anna was "difficult," the church was stuffy, the parson was stuffier and the congregation was stuffiest of all. On Monday they picnicked in a wood where George wandered and botanized. With his pockets bulging with little plants he would roam back to the others to pull the plants to pieces, discoursing meanwhile of their interesting histories with a rare enthusiasm. At such times his conversation was like a perfectly straight flat road; it was not exactly unpleasant but it had no end, no end at all, and occasionally the glances of Lubin and Sylvia met in a sort of rueful recognition of this.

Each morning, rising at an early hour, George would jog off on long blundering walks, filling his pockets with anything that presented itself to his acquisitive mind as an object of scientific knowledge, and returning at breakfast time with savage appetite and a fund of astonishing notions. In the garden he would stand and peer among the gooseberry bushes, a confusion of long spines covered with leaves, lacerating barbs, and multitudes of tiny flowerets, each with five little flaps, five little pins, and five little bobs (so he described them) surrounding a hairy double column. Wild bees were there, the bumbledorum booming with fury as it clutched a floweret in its great arms like a re-

triever playing with a gosling. George could not see if anything happened, the flower was so small and the bee so big — besides, his sight was poor — but he was charmed to watch them.

"And there were six," he would declare, "six of those bees all in one gooseberry bush, all at one time, six great bulky bees!"

"What *did* you do?" smiled Sylvia.

"I didn't do anything."

"Those large things," remarked Anna, "never sting you. You can catch them and hold them in the hollow of your two hands, and they roar and roar but they never bite you."

"Really, Anna! And *can't* they bite you?" George's interest was profound.

"No," said Anna.

"Why *is* that, Anna?" he pleaded. But that was all Anna knew about them, and so George determined to catch some and investigate.

On Tuesday Anna would not go out at all, she begged to be left alone. Her head! Terrible. George and Lubin set out with Sylvia between them. The day was again of extraordinary brilliance (it was a wonderful week) and Lubin was delighted to be walking by the side of the entrancing Sylvia, he could feel a sympathy and an understanding growing between them. He wished they

could be alone together so that he could explain that fine feeling to her. There was one occasion when in passing in single file down a path in a wood he almost embraced her behind the back of the unconscious George. At a glance from her then he would have taken her hand and they would have flitted away together down among the alleys of the trees until George was baffled. Well, and what then? At the end of the wood they came to some arable land. George suddenly darted upon the tilled field and picked up a rough stone. "By Jupiter!" he cried, "a flint!"

"Isn't he a goose!" murmured Sylvia to Lubin.

"Oh, he's a genius," averred Lubin with enthusiasm, "he gets an interest out of everything."

"Doesn't he!" she said brightly.

"Very clever," continued Lubin. "And the way he plods on and on into a subject until he finds whatever it is he's after used to make me want to hit him, once on a time."

"I know, I know," cried she enthusiastically. "I feel exactly like it myself sometimes."

"I'm all the other way," he said. "First impressions are what count with me. I always feel that if the interest, meaning of a thing, doesn't come in the first flash then it can't be of any importance to me."

"Yes," cried Sylvia. "I feel that way, too, exactly. George envies you the way you grasp things straight off."

"Well, it's just how one's born, I suppose. I never study anything, but I don't think there's anything I couldn't understand. Not perfectly, of course, but you see my meaning; I don't mean that nothing is unknown to me, but that nothing ever surprises me; that's it, no new discoveries and things like that. And if one has imagination, well, imagination is subconscious experience, it's knowledge, it is intuition."

"Yes, I should think you have a very good imagination," commented Sylvia.

"There's nothing new under the sun, you see. It's here all the time and always has been. We know it is here and we just find it."

"We just find it," echoed Sylvia. "Isn't it extraordinary? It's a feeling I often experience."

Of course he did not believe her, for if there is one thing you can never relinquish it is the charm of your Self, your own uniqueness. He just said "Humph." They stood close together for a moment while a young man and woman leading a goat passed by, and then George rejoined them, rattling with stones.

"Now what is the use of all these flints?" Lubin a little contemptuously asked.

"Do you mean in a scientific sense?"

"In any sense."

"Well, they were used as axes and knives before metal was discovered, they help to show something of our origin and development."

"Yes, but what is the use of that?"

"Oh," George fumbled with the idea for a moment, "they have a scientific importance, historical interest, the culture of that time and so on. Experience teaches, they say, but so does history. History is experience, isn't it?"

"But what can *we* gain from a culture that cut its food with a brick like that?"

"That brick, as you call it, tied to the end of a stick was all our ancestors a thousand times removed had to kill an elephant with."

"Why did they kill the elephants?" asked Sylvia.

"Oh, for many things. They were two or three times the size of any jumbo we've got now, or ever likely to get."

"I suppose it's a good thing they are all dead and gone," she sighed.

"Well, I don't know. Armed only with a flint like that he had courage enough and skill enough

to go out and kill an elephant! That was my ancestor!"

"He must have been terribly destructive," Sylvia was rather unsympathetic, and Lubin declared he would much rather discover something that would tell him the history of the future.

"But why should you want the future more than the past — there may not be any future. And again, they may be the same thing."

Lubin was more than ever sorry for Sylvia, George was such a bore. He wasn't a fool, but he was *such* a bore, and Sylvia may have been a fool — but she was delightful.

The next morning George appeared with a new and devastating enthusiasm. He had just met an angler, carrying a pike a yard and a half long and looking as if it weighed a hundredweight; an extraordinary charming man with whom he had promised to go fishing. Lubin very cheerfully took both ladies under his wing. On the whole it was a charming day, but Anna was something of a nuisance. She was afraid of cows and afraid of being lost and whenever Lubin and Sylvia strayed from her side in the woods (just to pick flowers) her voice would soon be heard calling: "Where are you?" He would reply almost petulantly: "Here, here." Once he had taken Sylvia's arm; she looked

demurely at him and sniffed at three white flowers she had picked. " Lubin, Lubin, Lubin ! " came Anna's voice. They were hidden from her and he would not reply.

" What are those ? " he asked.

" Anemones, windflowers," said Sylvia.

" What pretty names."

Sylvia began to pin them into her coat, " They are also called Venus' tears," she said.

" Where are you ? " cried the thin voice again.

Sylvia replied : " An . . . na. An . . . na ! "

When they returned home it was apparent that George's new passion had begun to ravish him; he was bursting with piscatorial chit-chat. Did they know that fishes had no eyelashes ? Extraordinary that they — yes, no eyelashes. He had got hold of a boat, and they were all to go fishing tomorrow. Lubin said " No "; boating made him ill.

Next morning Anna, George and Sylvia went forth to angle, while Lubin stayed at home with a newspaper, developing a romantic calculation which furnished its own agreeable answer when Sylvia came hurrying back — something had been forgotten. Charming she looked, breathing so deeply, and mocking Lubin as he sat in his armchair with the newspaper on his knees.

"Why won't you come with us?"

He had known she would come back. "I dislike fishing," said Lubin.

"So do I — but I go. George is carrying a rod and a paper full of worms."

"Tragic."

"And Anna has got a net and a can for the prey. Why aren't you coming? Really?"

"I loathe fishing."

"So do I. So do I." Sylvia went and sat on the arm of his chair. "Papa was fond of fishing, and my little brother used to catch minnows for him to fish with. When he stuck them on his hooks he assured Tommy that it did not hurt the minnows; he said they loved it, it did them so much good. And then that wretched boy came home and stuck a lot of pins in my gold fish. Of course they died and they floated in the glass bowl like funny little shipwrecks. Were you annoyed about something?"

Lubin was not annoyed, but why did she go fishing? "Stay at home with me, and let's go for a picnic."

"Can't," she said.

"Why not?"

"I don't think I could to-day."

"To-morrow, then? Let them fish again to-morrow and we will go out to-morrow?"

"I thought you were offended."

"No," he said, "Shall we go to-morrow?"

"Yes, I think we might."

"All day?"

"Why not?"

"Why not!" echoed Lubin. Then Sylvia left him and again went forth to angle.

Lubin spent the day in the company of the bailiff, inspecting animals. At night, airing his new-won knowledge of the ruminants, he drew upon them all a long disquisition by the ardent scientist.

"Horses and cows and sheep and pigs and rabbits can only eat their food where they find it. They can't accumulate a larder and eat at their leisure, they just walk about all over their food and eat it when they are so inclined. But" — and here George was impressive, tapping the table with his forefinger — "lions and tigers and foxes, the carnivora, can carry their victims away and devour them at their own sweet fancy, as they like. Man, you see, can do either, and he can also command food to be brought to him from the Lord knows where (Shrivenham's, said Sylvia). He need not go towards it (Shrivenham's will deliver, said his wife), he need not mark down his victims (Shrivenham's will take all risk, said she), and he does not destroy them with talons and fangs

(but with telegrams and false teeth, said she). Now all animals useful to man are vegetarians. The elephant, strongest of all, is; so are sheep, the ox, the horse (the ass, interpolated Sylvia), yes, and so are rabbits and we may include even the barn door fowl."

"Cock-a-doodle-doo," cried Lubin, who wanted to join in the rally with Sylvia.

"Don't be foolish, Lubin," said Anna. "Listen."

"Well," continued George, "this is all I am driving at. What I wanted to say was that these are submissive tameable animals. . . ."

"They have the will to subjection," interposed Lubin.

"Exactly. But those others, wolves and tigers and so on, are all extremely cunning and haven't any submission. You see the difference between the menagerie and the farm. Now listen: what I am driving at, what I want to say is this. If" — again the impressive tapping with fore-finger — "I were prime minister of this country (Vote for Shrivenham's, murmured Sylvia, with her elbows on the table, puffing curls of saucy smoke), if I were prime minister I would forbid the eating of meat and so eliminate cunning and cussedness. I would turn the race into a vegetarian one (Bang

goes Shrivenham's!) orderly, submissive and useful. That would do them!"

"You mean that in order to prevent the country going to the dogs you would turn it into a home for tabby cats?"

"I think," Anna broke in, "I will go to bed."

"Head bad, Anna?" George showed his solicitude, gentle and anxious, he was truly the sympathetic friend. But Lubin, her own husband, Lubin was quite unmoved; he was always unmoved by poor Anna's head; it, in fact, annoyed him. She wasn't an organism, she was just merely the autograph of an incumbrance.

2

George declared that a finer morning had never dawned on the world than the next morning. He had been looking at eyes, he said.

"Sheep's eyes and hens' and rabbits'. They grow on opposite sides of the head so the poor wretch is always trying to focus two different scenes at one time. Well, that must be extraordinarily difficult, that's why they are so silly, so timid, only one brain to correlate two separate visions, it's a house. . . ."

"More coffee, George?"

" . . . a house divided against itself. No, thank you. In the higher animals, the foxes and dogs, the eyes have moved round to the front, both eyes look at the one object, therefore the brain's work is simplified and its power is increased, until in man. . . ."

" Anna would like the marmalade, George."

" Marmalade, Anna! . . . Until in man both eyes are right in front and close together. That's what accounts for our supremacy, not our brains but the position of our eyes. Now why should we have two eyes at all? One eye bang in the middle of the face would be just as good and more simple."

Anna begged to be excused from any excursion, the sun overpowered her. George was as desperately engaged to a farewell bout of fishing as any worm to any dangling hook. It would be a pity to fritter away the last of the holiday, it was such an extraordinary day — said the others. As to this there was complete concord, so while George departed gaily to the river and Anna reposed in a room with the blinds pulled down, George's wife and Anna's husband went off together.

Everything the brightness touched, and it touched everything, was transfigured, but nothing so well became the day and the occasion as Sylvia in striped frock, her arms half bared, and a wide

hat. The trees had gently burgeoned, hedges were coated with green delicate umbrage and white delicate bloom. The sound of the softest of breezes shook in their ears. Down by a green bank they watched a lark slowly descending. Down upon the green bank they both sat.

"This," said Sylvia lazily, "is heaven."

"Itself," added Lubin. "Perfection."

Just below them flowed a shallow brook, and from the opposite bank a solitary stripling ash tree hung its nude, grey limbs over the water. Beyond the brook was a rich field where grass was so deeply green that it seemed to be turning blue. It had daisies more white than snow, dandelions more bright than gold, and a score of sheep that stood feeding, scarcely moving, their heads interminably bent to that satisfying sward. Farmbuildings stood solidly in a corner, with barns and ricks. In the sharp glare those grey walls looked almost white, while the blooming veils of flowering trees looked almost grey. A cypress standing in the yard was as dark as its own shadow, there was nothing else in the world so dark except the square opening to a blue dog kennel against the wall.

"But after all there is no such thing as perfection," Lubin reflected, "If once a perfect thing

were done God would be satisfied. But He is not, He waits and waits. You see what I mean?"

"I don't believe that at all," exclaimed Sylvia.

"Well, there is no perfection and never has been, whether you take the arts or politics or business. I once met a really great man, an amazing intellect, but do you know — he wore spring side boots. Think of it! The most beautiful woman I ever saw waggled her behind as she walked. It made her ridiculous. No, if there were perfection people would die of it, the universe would cease, or it would have to rest, exhausted."

Sylvia said: "But I often see perfection and feel it too. Everybody does."

They did not argue any more. Sylvia lay upon her side, her hand supporting her cheek. She wore a straw hat trimmed with unnatural cherries. Serious and beautiful was her expression. She was thinking: "He is a strange man. How clever he is. I like him very much," when he suddenly said: "Sylvia," and put his hand upon her knee. It seemed so beautifully friendly at that moment, it was the first time he had used her name.

"Yes . . . Lubin?" she answered, but keeping her gaze directed upon the moving brook below them.

"Sylvia!" He looked quickly round upon the

world. "You are right, this has the very tick and tone of perfection, it might be the very hour."

"You mean for something to eat."

The hand upon her knee had a strange warm caress in it, and an atmosphere was twining about them in some vague way that demanded the rigour of such a diversion.

"No, I don't," retorted Lubin.

Sylvia sat up. The disturbing hand still lay upon her knee; she slapped it with three soft protesting slaps and looked into Lubin's eyes.

They were very close to hers. "Yes, I think we should have lunch *now*."

"All right," Lubin said, and they had lunch. That is to say they each divested an egg of its coating and consumed the nucleus with a squad of Bath Oliver biscuits. Each took also one sandwich of tongue and one of cress, a banana and five almond nuts. George's wife then found a few odd chocolates in her bag and Anna's husband lit a cigarette for Sylvia and fitted it between Sylvia's lips. Both then lolled back in graceful negligent uncomfort and:

"The world is a charming place, Lubin," says she.

"O full of charm, perfect Sylvia."

After a while he took another cigarette from his case: "A light, if you please, Sylvia."

"Certainly, Lubin."

As they leaned together Lubin's audacious hand again lay for a brief while upon Sylvia's knee with a pleading pressure.

"Thanks," he said, and they leaned back again while Sylvia sat up staring at the brook. The moving water cast its gleams upwards on the shaded parts of the young ash tree, and the shimmer worked upon it like spinning air consuming the unconscious boughs. It was very hypnotic. Her thoughts were as vague as that moving shimmer, but though they were vague they persisted. She would avoid walking in front of Lubin, not that there was anything to mind in that, but she was trying to envisage the handsome lady who had walked ridiculously. Queer of him to plump that out in that way. "No," thought Sylvia, closing her eyes and letting the smoke drift from her nostrils, "he is very delightful, but I don't think I like him enough for that."

They walked on and in time came to another clear brook running through dainty margins of grass beside a wood that dimly invited them into its pleasant shade. Lubin quenched his thirst by dipping his palms in the water and scooping

rapid handfuls into his mouth with a sort of gobble.

Mrs. Shrivenham would like some! So Lubin sunk upon his knees, locked his palms together and produced a gill of water. Sylvia bent to drink, but the brim of her hat prevented her. She flung her hat upon the grass and he dipped again. This time she embraced his folded hands with her own and partook of the water; not with the horrid gobble he had employed, but with a beautiful little bubbling noise. Yes, she would like some more, and as she bent her head into his hands again her pleasant hair almost touched his face. It had a central parting and then a cross parting at the back so that Sylvia's head presented to him a white diagram something like the letter T. O, very white it was, and for one idiotic moment he wondered whether the letter T on the top of a woman's head stood for anything: like Teetotalism, say, or Temptation; was it any sort of a symbol or signal. Exquisitely white and clear it was. He kissed it.

"Some more?"

"Um," agreed Sylvia nodding wet drops from her nose and chin. Again she bent and again he kissed her hair. "How lovely!" she cried, drying her hands and face upon the handkerchief he tossed her. His own hands he wiped upon the

grass, still kneeling before her. Then he put his two hands upon her hips and kissed her approximately in the pit of the stomach.

"No, Lubin," she murmured warningly, but he clasped her tightly round, while she gazed past him into the shadowy wood: it was full of trembling anemones, frail and pale, and a tom-tit upon a tree was shouting excitedly Peter! Peter! Peter! Peter!

"Be quiet," said Sylvia sharply, "somebody is coming."

He sprang up, but there was nobody within sight. He was indignant at such a trick. "Why did you say that? There is no one!"

"My dear man!" Sylvia was haughty. "I don't mind your forgetting yourself, but to forget me, too!" She picked up her hat and began to fit it on again. "Oh, no. Shall we go home?"

"But Sylvia! We've only just come out. Sylvia!"

"You begin like this — where on earth will it end? You don't seem very much concerned." That stupid grin upon his face made her indignant.

Oh, damn the woman — thought Lubin — why is she making all this fuss; but he said aloud:

"No, really, Sylvia, you know. It's something like this. Life's a very up and a down affair, it's

either like an avalanche or it's like a glacier. A glacier moves an inch in a hundred years — ask George — and suddenly it becomes an avalanche. Now it's not the faintest bit of good trying to stop an avalanche. . . ."

" No, but I can step out of its way. Have your avalanche by all means, but there's a little too much destruction about them for me."

Amusing that, ha, ha! And Sylvia, too, smiled. He was quite unrepentant. It was just like him, and he looked as fascinating as ever. But she could not love a man of that kind, it was quite impossible to love a man like that, quite. She was adjusting her hat. Lubin was watching a rook perilously perched on the topmost twig of a tree, a solitary rook, cawing with sulky benevolence. It may be impossible for mankind to assume such an air, but it is not so for a rook; and something in the rook's expression resembled Sylvia's attitude and so Lubin ventured to link his arm in hers.

" Where shall we go? " Sylvia demanded with a surrendering sigh. He led her tenderly away and they came to a cottage where an old wife served them with tea in her tiny parlour, crowded with a chiffonier, a cheesy atmosphere, and a very large fender. On the chiffonier stood a black china pug dog with gilt ears and the face of Satan. Its neck

was encircled by a real pink celluloid collar dangling a padlock as big as sixpence and a real brass bell that tinkled when Sylvia poked it. It was long before the kettle would boil and so Lubin, who had a pleasant knack of getting — as Sylvia put it — on the right side of all sorts of people, persuaded the old wife to show them the Roman coins which her late husband had at various times ploughed up in the fields. They were in a bag, a cotton bag that had once contained dog meal. She kept the bag in the sliding drawer of her sewing-machine. Tremulously her ancient hands laid the coins before the visitors.

"They are very old, sir, you can hardly see the names. Carolus and Gulielmus IV. Latin you see. There's Kruger ones too, which I've heard that a Kruger shilling is worth a hundred pounds. But you can't believe all you hear less it's in black and white so's you can have the law of 'em."

"George would love to see these," remarked George's wife.

"Wouldn't he, just!" assented Lubin.

The old dame brought in the teapot, and shut them in alone together, after desiring them to call her if they wished for anything more, which Sylvia heartily assured her they would certainly do.

They sat opposite each other close to the win-

dow. There was a tree — it was a damson tree — covered with rich bloom. It stood at the far end of the long narrow garden that had been neatly tilled. There were no flowers and no vegetables as yet in that orderly mould, only the damson tree. Lubin peered at it. He said nothing. Sylvia's hands lay upon the table; he pressed them in his own.

" Forgive me? " he asked.

" Lubin dear! " She protested she had no notion of anything to be forgiven him.

" But you wanted to run away — home? "

She drew back her hands with a smile, consoling and mischievous. " Was I very harsh? "

" You were Napoleonic."

" But I had to admonish you, Lubin, didn't I? "

" Ah, you did, you did! But beautifully, kindly. They say women are all alike, but you at least are different."

" Am I so different? "

" O radiantly! Everybody, of course, is really different from everybody else, but you, somehow Sylvia, are just differently different."

The morning's excitement was subdued in him, Sylvia's bounty had allayed it, he was full of a tranquil happiness, mild and tolerable. But the violent emotion had not been utterly routed — it

had only changed its ground, its burden had been thrust upon Sylvia, as if they had given to each other their extremes of desire.

" Am I forgiven? " he murmured. Nodding the confession, she took his hand and pressed it to her lips.

They were back once more at the old confrontation of the morning. As if in accord the sky itself darkened.

" It is going to rain," cried Sylvia, rising. From their window they saw the old woman scuffling into the garden, they heard her mumbling: " O hark, the rain, it's raining, raining! " as she snatched some cotton garments from a hedge. Large heavy drops of the shower rushed upon the landscape and there was a crumple of far thunder in the sky. Lubin clasped Sylvia by the wrist and dragged her to his breast. She did not repulse him, but breathlessly murmuring " O hark, the rain, it's raining, raining! " she led him to the window.

The swift large drops were pelting the flowery damson tree with a thousand excitations. Away there at the end of the long garden, it seemed as if its white bosom of bloom was tingling and trembling and writhing under the bathing shower. He did not look at it, he did not want to look at it, he had got Sylvia.

"You marvellous little bitch," he whispered, ruffling her fiercely, "little bitch, bitch, bitch!"

"No, Lubin, not here, not here." Then the shower faded away as lightly as it came; they could hear it humming as it scattered over the farther fields. The tidy mould under the damson tree was covered with smitten petals.

"Let us go now," Lubin said aloud. "Shall we go back to the wood?"

"Yes, let us go back to the wood," said Sylvia. They went almost in silence but the wood was very far away; they had forgotten the road by which they came, and they loitered so often to clasp each other that day was almost gone when they reached it.

"O Lubin," said Sylvia, "we must not stay, it is too late." The sun had fallen out of the sky but its wild fantasy hung in the western heaven. A long veil of ruby spume seemed to curl round a mountain of slate that held a tiny angular tarn of strange green silver. Around the peak moved soft mounded clouds — like blue buns. In the cool dimming fields partridges sneered and snarled. The last chaffinch was piping: Whink, whink! A chill air agitated the trees until they gave out their solemn cries.

"Hullo, you two," cried a voice. George and

Anna were walking together to meet them! "Thought we might meet you," cried the amiable George.

"How jolly!" shouted Lubin.

"I am so tired," said Sylvia.

"So's Anna," laughed George, "but I persuaded her to come."

"Did you catch any fish?" asked Lubin as they all walked along.

"Moderately successful; a few eels, and a chub. Did you know, Lubin, that eels come out of the water at night and travel across fields like snakes? They spawn in the sea, too, in the deepest parts of the deep sea, and the young eels manage to find their way back to these dribbling little streams and then go for walks at night!"

The party broke up next day. All was as before. George's wife had re-attached herself to her husband.

3

To Lubin's chagrin he did not meet his old friend again for a long time. George, previously so unescapable, now seemed to have vanished without cause or reason. Simple as the explanation would probably be, Lubin was uneasy rather than solicitous. There must be a reason, he argued, a

simple reason: illness perhaps, but then George was never ill, he had the healthy recurrence and inevitability of a passenger train: he *might* have gone abroad, only he was as provincial as an owl and had nothing to go for. Suppose it was intentional evasion: what would that import?

Often he had avoided George, had dodged him, but now — the very deuce of an irony! — George was nowhere to be seen! Could it be that Sylvia had been silly — women in love were extraordinarily reckless — had she been silly enough to tell George of their tender adventure? It was absurd to write to a man you usually met every day and might meet again to-morrow.

That was his qualm. It did not amount to a moral scruple, it was the merest twinge of a healthy conscience, a feeling of guiltless guilt or guilty guiltlessness — so it presented itself. What was there in it after all? They had just kissed, no more than that, and if a man may not kiss the wife of his best friend — well, whose wife may he kiss?

Anna was more difficult and more unamenable than ever. The holiday had brightened her a little, but at home she had soon sunk again into the languor that exasperated him. A great many things about Anna annoyed him, in fact in most things she was by now (quite unconsciously, poor wretch,

and that was her worst sin of all) deeply disagreeable to him. He had to suppose that she was an invalid, she had no more visible vitality than a potted shrub. She was there, and there she interminably was, seldom going abroad in the day, and at night disinclined to accompany him anywhere. He did not want her to accompany him, but at times he tentatively suggested a drive across London — perhaps they might call on the Shrivenhams — ? Anna displayed anything but an inclination to accede to this, and when pressed to go she refused.

He was baffled. " It is so strange, I thought you liked them very well."

" But I don't want to go," was her constant reply.

She lay sidelong on the settee sucking a lemon. Nothing was so enraging to him as her habit of sucking lemons. She would pursue them so steadfastly that he could hear, or he swore to himself he could hear, every trickle of them reverberating in her inside.

" I don't want to go."

" But Anna darling! We haven't seen them since we came back. They might be dead, or ill."

" You go," Anna said coolly. " Go by yourself, go by all means."

"But I can't go without you now, it would look odd."

"Odd?" queried Anna.

"Yes, without you."

"Tell them I'm not very well," she said.

"You like old George, don't you?"

She agreed that she liked George.

"And Sylvia?"

"I like Sylvia, but she likes me as much as a monkey does mustard."

"Mustard! What is it you are saying! My *dear* girl!"

"She dislikes me, I tell you, she loathes me."

"What an idea!"

"I don't mind it, but I am conscious of it. There's no reason why you shouldn't go."

"Let's go together, Anna. I know positively your notion of her is all wrong."

"Go and see her yourself, if you want to."

"But I don't want to see her, it's George I want to see."

"Then go yourself, silly man." Anna was extraordinarily reasonable.

"It's impossible, quite, how can I explain to them?"

"Explain what?"

"That you dislike Sylvia and won't visit her."

" Well, don't explain it. And I tell you I don't dislike her — she dislikes me."

" It is still more impossible to explain that."

" Do what you please," said Anna.

After sulking for a while he sighed. He heaved a very considerable sigh. " What about asking them here; shall we ask them over? "

Without looking up from her novel or her lemon Anna replied: " If you want to. Why not? "

" All right then."

But the invitation was not sent, and he did not see George for two whole months; they had, as it were, died to each other, it was extraordinary how you could miss people. Then Anna proposed to visit her mother who had gone to Harrogate for a short holiday. And Anna went, Lubin accompanying her devotedly to the station, whispering " au revoir " and the customary nothings of such partings. " Remember me to mamma, don't forget your cod liver oil, come home soon," and so on.

" By-bye," said Anna with a smile, brushing his nose with her lips, and really, she looked charming and well and sparkling again.

He waited three days longer; he waited until Sunday morning, and then he went over to see George. The Shrivenham villa was a new villa,

all gables and chimney pots, and of course there was a lawn and a pink sand path from the gate to the doorstep. The maid showed him into George's den and he hovered nervously there for quite a long time, it seemed to him. Suddenly Sylvia appeared, silently offering him to shake an extraordinarily limp hand. He had but just time to note that her appearance was sad, tired and wan, when she said: "What a tragedy!"

Tragedy or no he felt he ought to take her into his arms, they were alone, the door closed, but for the moment he gaily inquired:

"Tragedy! How's everybody?"

Sylvia turned from him and sank down into an arm-chair: "What's to be done?" she asked.

"Done?" he said softly. She certainly looked distraught. "What is the matter — are you ill?"

"I am well," she said. "But Anna, what about Anna?"

He told her about Anna.

"You've not heard from George?"

"No, the rascal!" he cried gaily.

She drew a letter from her bosom: "It came yesterday. Read it."

It was dated from Harrogate Hotel.

"DEAR SYLVIA,

"I am afraid this letter will shock you very much, but by the time you get this Anna and I will have taken the decisive step. We have come here together."

"Good God, is this *my* Anna?" gulped the horrified Lubin, but without waiting for reply he skipped on.

"I tried as you know to put temptation from me, but Lubin has been an unspeakable brute to her, and that has complicated things."

"As you know! Did you know? What did you know?" But again he hurried into the letter.

"You and I were not suited to each other and could not do justice to each other, but that wasn't your fault. Nature's way is the way of trial and error. If she joins an unsuitable pair she will not rest until she has tried to adjust the error. It horrifies the moralists and she don't often succeed, but Nature can't be content with a world of mistakes. It's out of our hands now, and I cannot come back and I have no excuses to offer.

"With deep regret,

"GEORGE."

He put the letter down and Sylvia stared at him.

"What could he see in that little fiend?" The harshness in her voice was a revelation.

"Harrogate!" said Lubin, "but she has gone there to visit her mother."

"It began at Whitsuntide, down there, you know," said Sylvia.

"Whitsun! But I did not know." His glance tried to cling to the fierce light in Sylvia's eyes, but it wavered and broke down. He stared instead at a little chalk bust of Darwin on the mantel-piece.

"You remember how they schemed to get us out of the way down there! You remember that! They packed you and me off together somewhere and they were alone all day. Such deceit! I cannot bear deceit."

Good God! — thought Lubin — neither can I. What devilish chicanery were women not capable of!

"Anna was supposed to be ill," Sylvia was saying. "Did you know she was so perfectly villainous? It angers me more than anything — that posing as a sufferer. And you remember she stopped at home, and you remember he was supposed to go fishing; but no sooner were we gone than they were on the river together — did you know she was such a liar? And then the accident happened!"

Lubin hummed and heard and nodded to her interrogations until his whirling mind scooped up the phrase "the accident." He glanced humourously at it, it was such a choice expression to apply to Anna's seduction — if that was what was meant. Accident! Well, well.

"Did you know of their accident — they fell out of the boat?"

He could now meet Sylvia's stern gaze without quailing. "No, what on earth were they doing? Fell. . . . out! Of the boat?"

Sylvia closed her eyes for a moment to the glaring implications: "It sunk, or turned over, or something. They were nearly drowned. George can't swim and it was very deep and very lonely, the place where they were, but Anna could swim and she helped him."

"That was jolly," exclaimed Lubin, "she saved him?"

"Didn't you know *anything* of it?" Sylvia's snort of exasperation was almost excusable. "It seems incredible, such cunning."

"Absolutely not a word, Sylvia. I hadn't so much as a shadow of suspicion. I knew nothing, and I know nothing, except what you have told me, just now, here this morning."

She gave a nod. "Have some whiskey?"

" This really knocks me over. Just a tot, if you please."

" Oh, I've got over the shock of it. One has to when there's nothing to be done. And besides, I saw it coming, but I was helpless. Once a thing like that starts there's no stopping it; it's like an avalanche, it overwhelms you. But I shall always love George, he's the one man in the world — ah, you can't understand! "

A tear dropped upon her hand as she gave him the glass of whiskey. Lubin pressed the hand, clasped it with tender sympathy, but Sylvia was like ice as she continued the story of the guilty couple.

" They scrambled out of the water but they were on the wrong side of the river, and it was a very deserted place. They couldn't get over again, the boat had sunk to the bottom, no bridge, no assistance, they were soaked, and she was too exhausted to walk. So they took their clothes off — can you imagine it — they hid by some bushes and took off their clothes and dried them then and there in the sun, in front of each other. I suppose it was the only sensible thing to be done — but can you imagine it! And then to walk home as if nothing had happened. That was the beginning, and I quite believe — you must forgive me, Lubin —

but I quite believe Anna overturned the boat on purpose. And of course once a thing like that starts there's no stopping."

"But how did you know all this?"

"George told me himself, the following week. He had a fit of remorse, he is really so straight and so honest, and he confessed to me that he and Anna had been quite wicked down there. I forgave him and he swore he would be faithful and not meet her again."

"I see, I see." Lubin nodded as illumination poured on him like a shower of fiery hail. This then was the secret of George's avoidance of him — for it *was* avoidance, as he had guessed all along. No wonder Anna had refused to meet the Shrivenhams, the two wretches had been in collusion notwithstanding George's panic and remorse. What a world to live in! Their lifelong friendship, too, known each other from childhood, the very closest friends, they had always been so, and yet even such a tie was not strong enough to protect one from treachery like this. Not that he minded Anna going off. It was a shock, of course, it was bound to be — he hoped he wouldn't die of it (Ha! ha!) — but it was George's action that was so strange, it was so unlike George, it took all the ballast out of one, it bewildered one. And de-

spite certain unnameable satisfactions even Anna's cool and placid deception was unnerving, too. Could he be dreaming? Hallucination was never as real as this — not real hallucination. Old Darwin frowned steadily on the mantel-piece, and Sylvia was certainly there before him, handsome as ever, but either he was whirling about in the cosmos, or the cosmos itself was whirling about him like a giddy roundabout at a fair, with painted dragons and giraffes that might come to life at any moment. Where could he turn for stability, for justice, for affection? He looked pensively at Sylvia.

"Yes, I begin to understand, but why wasn't I told? Why did you leave me in the dark?"

"What would have been the use, Lubin? I forgave him. He swore he would give her up."

He began to perceive (though still very dimly) that she really had got some sort of affection for George!

"But apparently he didn't."

"O yes, he did, but that ferret-faced liar got her claws into him again." Sylvia, in her distress, fairly broke down, moaning "George, George."

Lubin could not understand this any more than he could admire her affectation — for it *was* affectation — of conjugal piety. What the deuce was

there in George! What was there in the fellow to attract *any* woman, let alone two at once, two such women: the very two, as it happened, who had attracted himself?

"What's to be done, Sylvia? I mean about them —now?"

She was calm again: "Nothing. George married me. He's *my* husband. And he's not like other men at all. You can see that, can't you? Of course everybody is different from everybody else, but George is so differently different. Can you understand me? He married me and he's my husband. I'm sorry he is not happy."

It was ridiculous, it was unpalatable, but he could offer no comment; she was distraught, bowled over, probably — though she did not look it and was as handsome as ever.

"I've been the most faithful wife ever known," continued Sylvia. "I could have had — I don't mind confessing it to you — I could have had a dozen lovers if I had liked, but I never encouraged that kind of thing at all; I just loved George. But however modest a woman may be she is always deluded and deceived. Faithfulness is thrown away on men. A dozen, I assure you."

"Yes," murmured Lubin, "faithfulness is thrown away."

He could not help seeing that Sylvia cut a rather piteous figure. Any woman would in such circumstances, but to be deserted by a poor stick like George for a still poorer stick like Anna was ridiculous, too. There was a sort of bad taste about the whole affair, it was florid and it was horrid.

"You will stop to lunch, Lubin?"

"Thank you, Sylvia, but I wonder if I shall be in the way?"

"O no. I shall be so grateful, there's such a lot to be talked over."

It was an admirable meal and there was wine for them both, and George's cigars for Lubin. Afterwards they strolled about the lawn and the pink paths, chatting about flowers, the omnibus facilities of the neighbourhood, and a new kind of vacuum cleaner that Sylvia was charmed with; and then they sat in the drawing-room over the album of foreign views collected so assiduously by Sylvia. Once more she was quite her old engaging self, the woeful situation was ignored, it had fallen away, the album views were enchanting, and their spirits glowed.

She said: "Stay to tea with me, Lubin."

"Shall I?"

"Please! It is so good to have you here. And

to supper as well, won't you; there is so much to be discussed."

But the tremendous discussion did not arise. There seemed to be a thousand other interesting topics continually popping up, as if the morning's revelation had been sufficient for the evil thereof: what was done could never be undone, and there was no profit in dwelling upon sorrow and misfortune. The air of these implied reflections did not hang at all tangibly between them, nor was either conscious of any effort to ignore the leering scarecrow that was planted so inexorably in the midst of their confidence, but there was certainly a flavour, almost a rich flavour of gaiety about their intercourse, for Sylvia Shrivenham was a woman whose inadequacies and convictions were at least very happily mingled, and as for Dawes, he could always raise a snigger whenever he was confronted by a circumstance that confounded him — it was his supreme defence. It is unlikely that even a ghost could maintain its dignity if it were sneezed at. So they played together, certainly with propriety and with admirable spirit, and pushed, as it were, their terror under the table. After supper they sat so long that he began to wonder if she would offer him a bed. She did not do this, but

when he left (very, very late) Sylvia gave him again a warm distinctive pressure of the hand as if again to convey: It is all right. Yes, we shall meet again, we know where we are, you and I?

He went home without elation, but without gloom. It had been splendid to meet her again (he thought far more of Sylvia than he did of Anna), but he had felt a kind of relieved gladness, as of escape, in coming away as he had done. What was it, the strong compulsion that had driven George to desert her? He scoffed at the idea that Anna's fascination had anything to do with it. It was something queer in Sylvia herself, something indefinable, unrealizable, though once or twice he felt he was almost at the point of discovery.

The dubiousness of his domestic situation soon ceased to trouble him. In a few days he felt relieved, he was inclined to admit he was gratified, he was certainly free, and when the Anglo-American Corporation dispatched him on a mission to Nevada that lasted a couple of months he was as buoyant as a cork in a fountain and returned to England a happy and as it were a reinstated man without a qualm in the world.

One of the first things that greeted him on land-

ing was an affectionate little message from Mrs. Shrivenham, but he did not go to see her — though she had obviously expected him soon — until some time after his return and so she sent him another pleasant invitation to which he replied promising to visit her immediately. He smiled as he posted the letter. She wrote him again, and again he promised to go, and again he failed. And that was the end of it all. It was as if Sylvia, poor girl, had now taken on the likeness of that old effusively friendly George whose affection had aroused so small a flutter of response in his friend. It delighted Dawes to receive her delicate little mothlike missives. He always answered without an hour of delay and wrote very affectionate letters — but he always prevaricated, procrastinated and postponed. The Corporation was in the swirl of great and greater undertakings, their interests were extremely complicated and demanded his unremitting attention. It was imperative . . . and so forth.

"O bad, deceitful man," she would complain. "Have I offended you? You do not keep a promise. A thousand times I invite you and a thousand times you write me wretched little excuses that would not deceive a gnat. And what friends we were. (This was doubly underlined.) But some

day I shall steal a march on you. I shall beard the Lubin in his den!!! Do you ever hear anything of those wretches?"

No, he had heard nothing more of the two wretches.

A NOTE ON THE TYPE IN WHICH THIS BOOK IS SET

The type in which this book has been set (on the Linotype) is based on the design of Caslon. It is generally conceded that William Caslon (1692–1766) brought the old-style letter to its highest perfection and while certain modifications have been introduced to meet changing printing conditions, the basic design of the Caslon letters has never been improved. The type selected for this book is a modern adaptation rather than an exact copy of the original Caslon. The principal difference to be noted is a slight shortening of the ascending and descending letters to accommodate a larger face on a given body-size.

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